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By  
*Countess Belewsky*

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Film Reviews by G. M.

# SOUL IN SEARCH OF A BODY

*Rich Humour On A Fantastic Theme*

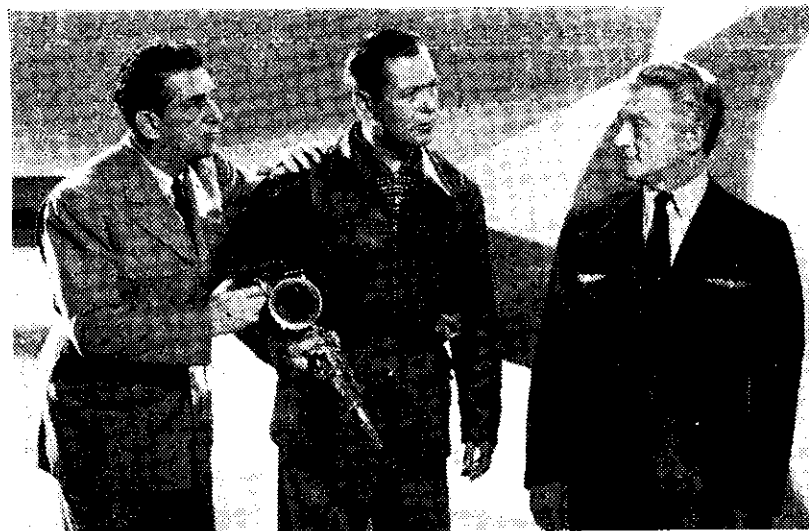
## HERE COMES MR. JORDAN

(Columbia)

THE title of this film does not, as might be supposed, refer to the recent visit to the Middle East of New Zealand's High Commissioner in London, but to the quite different visitations of an unearthly but very amiable personage whose routine job is to supervise the collection and despatch of souls, by air-liner, to Heaven, but whose special assignment, in this particular fable, is to find a suitable earthly body for the soul of a young prize-fighter (Robert Montgomery), to inhabit for the next 50 years. This contretemps in high places, embarrassing to all concerned, arises because of an excess of zeal on the part of Celestial Messenger No. 7013 (Edward Everett Horton), who, in a well-meant desire to spare the prize-fighter the pain of dying, snatches his soul from his body as it crashes to earth in a 'plane. What No. 7013 did not know was that the young man would have survived the crash and that, according to The Book, he was, in fact, destined to live till the year 1991, during which time, he would achieve his ambition of becoming world's champion boxer. So, to keep the records straight as well as to pacify the irate young man thus cut off in his prime, Celestial Messenger No. 7013 is instructed to return him to his body forthwith.

Unfortunately, when they do return to this mortal coil, it is discovered that the prize-fighter's body has already been cremated by his sorrowing manager and friend (James Gleason). Since the young man objects to going through all the bother of being born again, the only thing to do is to find him another ready-made body to fit. This is no task for an underling: it is undertaken personally by No. 7013's superior officer, the ubiquitous Mr. Jordan (Claude Rains), a kind of modernised Angel Gabriel. But the prize-fighter is not easy to suit: he is particular about the kind of body he inhabits. As a temporary arrangement, he at last agrees to move into the body which a wicked young millionaire has just vacated because his wife and his secretary have drowned him in the bathtub. What prompts the prize-fighter's decision is the fact that he has fallen in love with a girl (Evelyn Keyes), whose father has been wronged by the millionaire, and he wants the chance to put things right, having been assured by Mr. Jordan that it is his own soul that counts and that it will show through whatever body he occupies.

That is not the end of it, however. The prize-fighter still has to convince his manager that he is himself in another man's body; he still has to win the world's championship; he still has to win



NOT THIS TRIP: Celestial Messenger 7013 (E. E. Horton), the disembodied prize fighter (Robert Montgomery) and the ubiquitous Mr. Jordan (Claude Rains) at the Heaven-bound air-liner. A scene from "Here Comes Mr. Jordan"

the girl; and he still has to find a body that will suit him for the next 50 years (his tenancy of the millionaire's body is abruptly terminated by another murder attempt). All this he does at last achieve, thanks to the help of Mr. Jordan, who is always at hand when needed, though his presence is disturbing to all the other mortal characters, who can neither see nor hear him.

As I have mentioned before on this page, I am well aware of the risk that a critic may be swayed, perhaps unduly, by originality in a film; and it is possible that some down-to-earth picturegoers (down-to-earth is hardly the right phrase in this context), will find the fantasy of *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* too hard to swallow. But what must be stressed—and I should perhaps have done so earlier—is that this is primarily a most joyous and hilarious comedy. There is, of course, a good deal more to it besides, and it would be a dull dog who did not perceive the underlying vein of a philosophy that is somehow warm and comforting in its fatalism. But it would also be, I think, a dull dog who did not laugh heartily at such richly farcical episodes as James Gleason's frantic attempts to hold a conversation with the invisible Mr. Jordan, or the irritability of Edward Everett Horton when his disembodied prize-fighter proves hard to please. For, as the author of this singular play (it was originally called *Heaven Can Wait*), has wisely foreseen, philosophy, fantasy and sentiment—there is a good deal of that, too—are most readily acceptable when they are served up with a laugh. And if anybody complains that the subject of death is hardly a light-hearted one—I agree that some will find the whole plot blasphemous—I can only give my personal opinion that it might be better if it were.

Like many stories on a fantastic theme, the plot of *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* sometimes becomes over-complicated and loses touch with its beginnings. But for the most part, the director (Alexander Hall), has realised that the plot is unusual enough to stand on its own merits, and has not overburdened it with theatrically eerie effects. Indeed, thanks to his straightforward treatment, as well as to near-perfect performances by Montgomery, Gleason, Rains, Horton and one or two others, there is a surprising air of credulity about the whole thing. Don't mistake me: nobody expects you to believe it, but while you are in the theatre, you can at least accept it.

So I hope you'll see *Mr. Jordan* and laugh and enjoy it as much as I did.

## IT STARTED WITH EVE

(Universal)



IN my younger days, which roughly corresponded with those of cinema entertainment, it was the custom to release a Janet Gaynor film at Christmastide and an Eddie Cantor opus at Easter. A similar custom seems to have developed with pictures starring Deanna Durbin, and for several seasons now, Deanna has been served up as a Christmas and New Year attraction in many New Zealand theatres. I can think of nothing more suitable, for the Durbin films, from *Three Smart Girls* onward, have maintained a fairly consistent (and rather remarkable) level of gaiety and good melody. The latest, *It Started With Eve*, is no exception, though this time there is less emphasis on the melody. Universal's precious little song bird (she has been the studio's biggest money-maker for the last

(Continued on next page)