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Film Reviews by G.M.

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## THE SEA WOLF

(Warner Bros.)

FOR 33 years Jack London's *Sea Wolf* has been prowling round the cinema, making audiences' blood run cold. Its first appearance was in an unauthorised version in 1910, which annoyed the author so much that he secured an injunction against it: this was followed in 1913 by a seven-reeler, starring Hobart Bosworth. In spite of fancy trimmings, an injection of pseudo-psychology, a cast of very capable he-men (Edward G. Robinson, John Garfield, Gene Lockhart, Barry Fitzgerald), one very capable woman (Ida Lupino), and buckets of gore, it is a rather tired old *Wolf*, mangy in spots, that now makes its sixth, but probably not final, screen appearance.

Edward G. Robinson is Wolf Larsen, skipper of *The Ghost*, a sailing vessel which scavenges on the sealing trade. A sadist with an inferiority complex, he is afflicted by dizzy spells and threatened with blindness, and when he isn't booting his crew around or bashing their heads in, he consoles himself with Milton—with special emphasis on the line "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." Not the least of Captain Larsen's worries is the fact that he has an upright brother who has sworn to send him and his hell-ship to the bottom. Robinson does his best to make this combination of brute strength, literary taste, and psycho-analysis seem plausible, and sometimes he comes near succeeding, but the psychology (and the brother) prove too much for him in the end. The finale makes as clean a sweep of the *dramatis personae* as Hamlet does: the only two characters left alive are Garfield and Miss Lupino, as two warily-romantic young fugitives from justice (who were not on Jack London's original passenger list). And even their chances of continued survival are by no means guaranteed.

An interesting member of the crew against his will, is the author whom Larsen picks up out of the sea, and thereafter uses as the butt for a good deal of his eccentric cruelty. A newcomer, Alexander Knox, plays this part with calculated restraint, and his acting, in combination with the other performances, might have kept the film afloat if Hollywood had not overloaded the story with gory melodrama well beyond even Jack London's Plimsoll mark.

## GRAND CENTRAL MURDER

(M-G-M)

I DON'T want to sound petulant, but oh, I would like to see just a few nice simple films with a beginning, a middle and an end so that I could sit back in my seat and feel that I had the threads of the story in my hands. But when I'm thrust from flash one (a list of the players but not a word of the parts they are going to play), to flash two and three (elaborate lists of Messrs. Wurzel-Murzel and Mungel-Wungel and their multitudinous tripod-shifting-gown-designing-hair-doing jobs) and thence to flash four,

five etc. of a bewildering succession of escapes by Someone from Something or Somebody all among the trains in Grand Central Station, well, I do begin to wonder when one of the characters will sit still for a moment and explain just how *Grand Central Murder* begins. But here is this desperately-leaping man busy burrowing a dime from a workman ("I'll do as much for you one day"), to make a call to a mighty sulky-looking vaudeville actress. Oh, she screams, it's Turk; he's out He'll kill me.

All right. He's Turk. She's Mida King. So where do we go from here? First we see Mida rushing very fur-coated from the theatre; she says she's going to David's private car at Grand Central, Turk'll never find her there. And then we see—Oh, Mr. Van Heflin, why are you hiding in that dark corner, and who is the dame with you? All right, she's to meet you in half-an-hour, so we'll find out in good time. (We do. It's his wife. She's helping him. He's a private detective trying to clear Turk. Though we never find out what Turk hasn't done). So then we see Turk rushing about Grand Central with all sorts of G-men and so on on his trail. And then we see everybody plus a whole lot of people we've never even heard of before, but they're all suspects, including Mr. Van Heflin, for the murder of Mida King, whose body has been found ("A Beautiful Job, Inspector, not a mark or a bruise on her"), in the locked private car in which she and Wealthy Young David were Going South that night to be married. So then they all go back to the theatre and rehearse everything very retrospectively, and then they all go to the Grand Central Station where, after a great deal of Clever Deduction, Mr. Van Heflin solves the nasty crime.

Well, what's the matter with me? There's the story; at least there are the bones of the story, and rattling good bones, too. Yes, and some jolly fine bodies they hung on those bones—Patricia Dane, Cecilia Parker and Virginia Grey. But you know, if it hadn't been for Mr. Van Heflin, just where would that film have been? My guess is that its component parts would have been scattered, by anti-centrifugal action, to the 12 winds of the sky. But Mr. Van Heflin, with his Cagney-like casualness, his hard-working, very effective hands, and his friendly look of never having been a film star and of never having won an Academy Award; well, Mr. Van Heflin is the works again, as he was in *Johnny Eager*.

## FOR ME AND MY GAL

(M-G-M)

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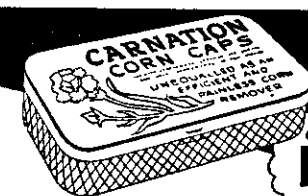


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