

MEET JOHN DOPE

(Warner Bros.)

MEET JOHN DOE is the most ambitious effort of Director Frank Capra in collaboration with Hollywood's highest-paid scenarist, Robert Riskin. It cost 1,100,000 dollars. Eight months were spent in preparing the script, six months in shooting it, two months in cutting and editing. The cast gleams with stars. But this time Messrs. Capra and Riskin have made a molehill out of a mountain of labour. Or, to be classical, I might quote Horace and say that the mountain has laboured and brought forth a mouse. Well, perhaps not a mouse, but a nice old sheep—very woolly and amiably ineffective.

Meet John Doe propounds a social philosophy not unknown to radio listeners in this country. Love Thy Neighbour is its theme—a simple theme and a noble one, which demands treatment of the same quality. But for all their dollars, all their months of work, all their stars, and all their good intentions, Messrs. Capra and Riskin find it as much beyond their powers as others who have attempted the same task. When they should be simple they are merely naive; instead of nobility there is half-baked sentiment and woolly idealism; too much talking and not enough straight thinking. Once or twice, I'll admit, the film does start to scale the heights, but more often it wallows in platitudes and long-winded rhetoric.

And yet the story had promise. It is about a girl columnist (Barbara Stanwyck), who, in a fit of anger, inserts into her column a bogus letter purporting to come from a man who declares that he is so sickened by the state of the world that he intends to jump off the top of the City Hall on Christmas Eve in protest. The letter is signed "John Doe," and is an immediate sensation. In order to keep the hoax going and the paper's circulation soaring, an out-of-work baseball player (Gary Cooper), is hired to impersonate "John Doe."

With the girl acting as his mouth-piece, the fame and philosophy of John Doe spreads all over the U.S.A. He becomes the symbol, the apotheosis, of the "little man," and thousands of "John Doe Clubs" spring into existence, the members of which are pledged to love their neighbours. Not until it is almost too late does John Doe discover that behind the whole movement is the sinister figure of a Big Business Fascist (Edward Arnold), who intends to harness the vague enthusiasm of the Doped masses for the purpose of getting himself elected President-Dictator of the U.S.A. When John Doe rebels, he is exposed as a hoax, and disappears in disgrace. But on Christmas Eve he turns up on top of the City Hall to carry out the original suicide threat, and so redeem himself in the eyes of the disillusioned "little men."

Doe doesn't jump—but even if he had it wouldn't have redeemed the picture. The only thing that might have done that would have been to scrap nearly everything and start all over again. It would not have been necessary to scrap Gary Cooper and Walter Brennan, who wrestle manfully with the problems of the script and, indeed,

save the film from complete collapse. But Barbara Stanwyck, thrashing around gives the appearance of being well out of her depth. Messrs. Capra and Riskin certainly are.

ARABIAN NIGHTS

(Universal)



WELL, the title's the same anyway. But hardly anything else is. For there is a tale they tell in Hollywood about Producer Walter Wanger who, having decided to film *The Arabian Nights*, ploughed through the original and then discarded it on the ground that it was just "a dull and dirty book," and set about writing his own version. I like that story, even if it is as much a tale as any that Scheherazade told, for it seems to me to explain a lot of things about Hollywood.

However, here we have the *Nights à la Wanger*—technicoloured nights and technicoloured days, with saffron sands and deep-blue skies, and the lithe golden bodies of Maria Montez, Jon Hall, Lief Erikson and Sabu, not to mention the Beauties of the Harem. Determined not to be dull (nor, of course, dirty), Mr. Wanger has concentrated on Colour, and I must say he gives us an eyeful, as he recounts his very own original tale of how Haroun-al-Raschid, the Caliph of Bagdad, battled with his wicked brother for the love of Scheherazade the dancing girl, and was assisted in all his battling by Sabu the Elephant Boy and a troupe of entertainers, whose ranks included two gentlemen named Aladdin and Sinbad. It is all pretty good fun—especially Aladdin's feverish rubbing of every lamp he comes across in case it should be the right one, and Sinbad's stock-phrase for every situation: "This calls to mind an experience I once had when I was a sailor." But being a bit of a traditionalist, I still prefer Burton to Wanger.

WHITE SAVAGE

(Universal)



HAVING left Arabia behind, here we all are again in even warmer platitudes—with Maria Montez, Jon Hall and Sabu on a typical tropical technicoloured isle somewhere in the Pacific. I can't give you the exact geography in case the Japs hear about it—but it must be fairly close to Africa, because they've got lions there. And yet it can't be far from the East Indies, because the natives and their architecture are distinctly Javanese. And yet they speak a kind of broken Mexican. Well, anyway, this isn't the only thing that doesn't make sense. . . .

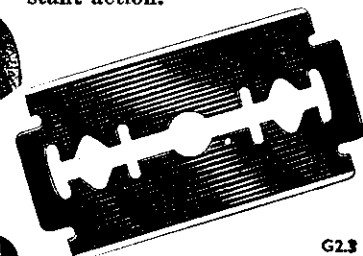
At first thought it might seem unnecessary to use technicolour on a *white* savage, but as soon as you see her you will notice that Miss Montez is just as bronze-skinned, black-haired and exotic as she was in Arabia. You will also notice that she is now trying to be a Jungle Princess just like Dorothy Lamour. What you will not so easily notice is any reason why the producers should have put such a lot of money and energy into making this picture.



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