

## CHICON IV REPORT

(extracted from a letter written at the con by Mark R. Leeper)

### OLD DARK HOUSE

Well, here I am at the World Science Fiction Convention. And I am about to review a film I was told I would never see. Somebody found a copy of the older OLD DARK HOUSE with (get this cast!) Melvyn Douglas, Raymond Massey, Ernest Thesiger, Charles Laughton, and Boris Karloff. I think this is a more interesting film than a good one. Until I saw it I thought that THE BLACK CAT was a totally off the wall and innovative black comedy. All of Universal's horror films were done straight and serious to that point and then they came up with the marvelous piece of self-satire that was THE BLACK CAT with its cold emotionless set design, its exaggerated weird-sounding names, and its exaggerated script ("You hear that, Vitos? The phone is dead...even the phone is dead!") OLD DARK HOUSE is a marvelous transition between the later BLACK CAT and their earlier horror films. OLD DARK HOUSE itself is based on the humorous novel by J. B. Priestly, which seems to derive from a very funny novel called COLD COMFORT FARM (written by Stella Gibbons). The basic plots of COLD COMFORT FARM and OLD DARK HOUSE are similar: innocents from the city trapped in the country house in which everyone harbors a deep, dark secret, like the old lady whose entire life was spent in brooding seclusion because when she was a young girl she "saw something NASTY in the woodshed." OLD DARK HOUSE sports its own cast of weird characters and room-hiders. The house is presided over by the waspish Thesiger, who is terrified by the third floor landing. There is the morbid old lady who eats like a horse and is convinced that everyone outside the house lives in unforgivable sin. Then there is the very old man who gleefully reminds people that when you get to his age "at any minute you could die."

Now, how well does the film stand on its own, without putting it into an historical perspective? It seems to be essentially a stage play and as such it is a little set-bound. The comedy does not all work but the film never fails to be at least interesting even if it isn't always funny. Characters seem to be thrown in for humorous effect, but they do not seem to advance the plot. Unlike the remake, the original is not a mystery, though there are killings. I think what made the film popular at the time it came out were the enormously eccentric characters, who will seem of familiar types now but who must have been much less

so before the film was plundered by its successors.

I have held off till last this film's real claim to fame at the time of its release. That was that this actor who had been around unnoticed for years until he played the Frankenstein monster was back in another horror role. People wanted to see more of Boris Karloff, or at least the studio sold the film as if they did. Karloff has a relatively small part as the mute butler who is extremely ugly and mean-looking ... but not dangerous ... as long as he is sober ... which isn't very long. I think that probably audiences were a little disappointed that they didn't hear Karloff speak. He grumbles a little and grunts in a manner less comprehensible than Welsh, we are told. Perhaps the studio felt that his slight lisp would keep him from any talking parts. Obviously it didn't for long. At any rate, OLD DARK HOUSE is a mildly amusing comedy of Universal's early sound era and is pleasant enough. Rate it +1 (on a -4 to +4 scale).

#### Japanese Animated Films

Something of a surprise from the land of Nippon is an animated feature film LUPIN III: THE CURSE OF MAMO. Lupin III is not Japanese himself; he is French. He is the grandson of Arsene Lupin, a detective created by Maurice Le Blanc before Doyle created Sherlock Holmes. Lupin III is sort of a character much like Leslie Charteris's the Saint. He has two sidekicks: one is a sort of a beatnik and the other is a samurai. His adventures are much like James Bond's, but are somewhat more spectacular because they are animated and they make use of the medium. (The background artwork is particularly well-detailed.) It sounds like the kind of thing that could be done poorly but Lupin really packs video rooms. I saw THE CURSE OF MAMO at a previous convention and have told the people I am with that it is worth seeing. These people have reasonably diverse viewpoints, but we all seem to agree Lupin is great.

CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO is a straightforward adventure in which Lupin is trying to rescue a maiden in distress from the evil monarch of a postage-stamp-sized country near Austria. CURSE OF MAMO is a considerably wilder film and pits Lupin against a sort of a supermind that has been manipulating human history for roughly 4000 years.

#### HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

I saw one and a half episodes of the BBC "Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy." It is neither as bad as I had been told, nor as good as I would hope. It's about what I

expected.

#### STUDENT OF PRAGUE

I saw STUDENT OF PRAGUE but I can't give it a fair review since the captions were in the original German and it was pretty hard to figure out what was going on.

#### KRULL

I just saw a presentation of the new film KRULL. KRULL will remind you of all your favorite fantasy films of recent years, a collection whose ranks it is unlikely to join.

#### Hugo Awards

I'm in the Hugo Awards ceremony and may as well list them here.

- Best Fan Artiste: Victoria Poyser
- Pat Terry Award for Extreme Artistic Cleverness  
(Pat Terry is in Australia so he's "distant"-Terry):  
Randall Garrett
- Best Fan Writer: Richard "just one of the" Geis
- First Fandom Hall of Fame: William E. Crawford (whoever that is!)
- Best Fanzine: LOCUST (the "t" is silent)
- British Awards: Short Story: the brave little toaster  
Novel: SHADOW OF THE TORTURER (who knows what evil...lurks in the dungeon)
- Japanese Awards: Foreign Short Story: the brave little toaster  
Foreign Novel: THE GENESIS MACHINE  
(Adam & Eve Mark III)
- Kelly Freas Painting (Raffle): 347822 (T. Messerill)  
(whoever he is)
- Special Award for Keeping the "Fan" in Fanzine Publishing  
(otherwise it would be just "ziné" publishing):  
Mike Glycer
- John W. Campbell Award to a Superior New Writer:  
Alexis Gilliland (It's between Fantasyland and Tomorrowland.)
- Kelly Freeze Memorial Art Award: Michael Whelan (and gnashing of teeth by your local little fuzzies)
- Best Professional Editor: Edward L. Ferman (E.L.F. because he pixie stories to go in F&SF)
- Best Dramatic Presentation: ~~DRAGONSLAYER~~ RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
- Best Non-Fiction Book: DANSE MACABRE by John Travolta
- Best Short Story: --->>>"The Pusher" by John Varleycorn
- Best Novelette: "Unicorn Variations" (with the horn in the back?)
- Best Novella: "The Saturn Game" (Ring Toss)

by Poul Christian Anderson (Look, Ma, no Hans!)  
Best Navel (awarded by Joan Vinge who made a personal  
study): DOWNBELOW STATION  
by C. J. (Cherries Jubilee) Cherryh

Okay, so DRAGONSLAYER didn't win this year. Maybe I was hoping for too much taste from SF fans when I can't even find it among my nearest and dearest. Okay, maybe it didn't win this year but there's always next year.