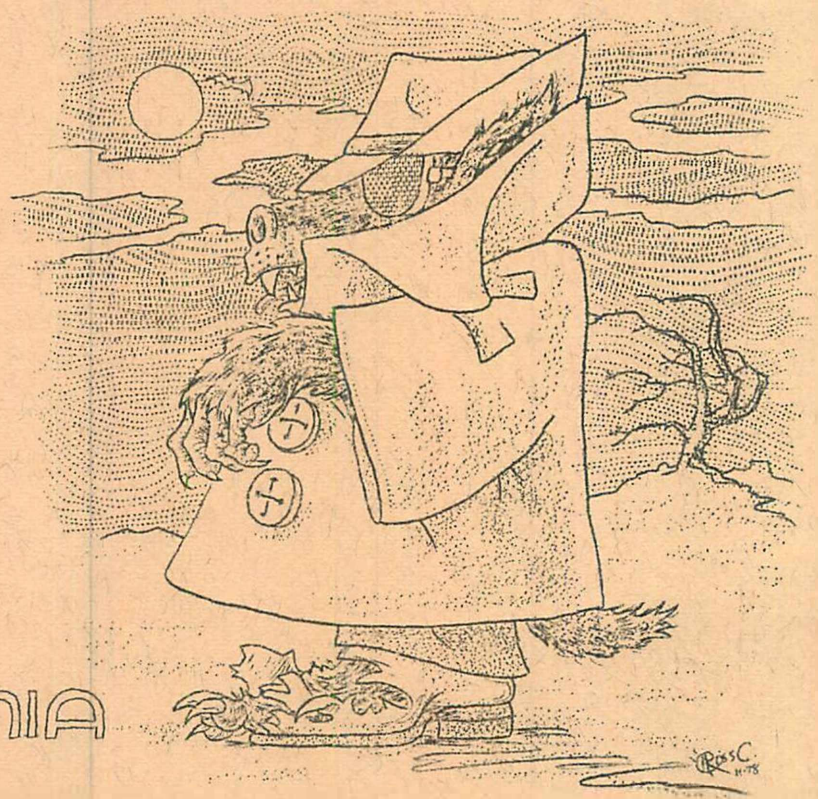
EXTRA #7



MONSTERMANIA

FOUR STAR EXTRA

Four Star Extra, Volume 1 Number 7, is produced by that hedonistic-to-the-hilt quartet, Joyce & Arnie Katz (59 Livingston St., Apt. 6B, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201) and Bill & Charlene Kunkel (85-30 121st St., Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11415). Published monthly, it is available by subscription (six issues for $5) or stellar whim. All money collected as a result of this "Monstermania" issue will be used to replace our worn copies of Warren Zevon singing "Werewolves of London".

Publication Date: November 19, 1978 Next Issue's Theme: The Holidays
Cover: Ross Chamberlain

FOURPLAY

MONSTERMANIA

Arnie: White fangs glinted in the silvery moonlight.

The fabulous foursome bringing you this joint editorial -- and the rest of this "Monstermania" issue -- were driving back to Brooklyn after seeing "Passion of Dracula" at the Cherry Lane Theater in Greenwich Village.

A red-liveried usher had pressed a little gift on each member of the audience as we filed out. I knew it was a good omen for this issue when I looked down at my palm and saw, resting there, a little set of fangs.

They were wonderful fangs, too; gleaming white and pointy. The appliance slipped neatly over both uppers and lowers to create a smile even Jimmy Carter would envy. We wasted no time putting them on, so that we could leer grotesquely out the window at everyone we passed.

Although street fairs were choking the streets with traffic, I soon noticed that a path opened magically before us no matter which way Charlene drove. Even a New York cabbie must think twice before cutting off a car full of vampires.

Bill: One of the most memorable things about monster movies were the premiums the theater distributed, usually to "the first 25 people on line" on the Saturday afternoons of my boyhood. Remember William Castle and his "gimmick flicks" like "The Tingler" and "13 Ghosts"? He wired movie house seats with "jolt boxes" for the former, while for the latter, he distributed special glasses without which the ghosts on screen were invisible.

Fourplay -- II

But the one I remember best was his first venture into the shock field, "Macabre". I guess I was about seven years old when I lined up with my friend Vito in front of the local RKO Madison a good two hours before it opened. It was a brutally cold November day, and when the wind blew down Myrtle Avenue, it transformed Saturday morning into a thing of brittle hands and frozen snot.

Mad as we were, there was one who was crazier still. He had been waiting an hour-and-a-half before we got there!

"I love this kinda pitcha," he told us again and again as we moaned and prayed on that godless street corner. And somehow the time finally passed. We paid our money and took our chances. The screen lit up; some ads for the local merchants, coming attractions and then -- blam! -- the movie. Before the cartoons, even.

A warning appeared on the screen to inform us that for the next 60 minutes (movies were shorter in those days) our lives were insured, should we die from fright while viewing Mr. Castle's magnum opus, by Lloyd's of London for $1,000. That's not much when one considers how incredibly unlikely such an event would be.

Our companion from the line was apparently amused by this. "Ain't nobody gonna take my life," he boasted in a loud voice. Matrons of that era were a terrible bunch, and one came down upon our hapless comrade before you could say, "Jack Robinson."

"Comedian, huh?" she asked, jerking him violently from his seat. She was over six feet tall and built like Bruno Sammartino. "Well, you're outta the movie now, wiseguy," she informed him sadistically. She then marched him down the aisle and kicked his poor ass out into that horrible cold.

Charlene: It occurs to me that some of our readers may be unfamiliar with that bane of childhood existence in the City of New York, movie matrons. The law here requires -- or required, I don't know if it's still in effect -- that children under the age of 16 cannot be in movie houses after 6 p.m. unescorted by an adult (making an after-school double-feature just about impossible to catch). And that during the daylight hours there should be a matron on duty to protect the wee bairns. Thoughtful are our New York lawmakers.

Unfortunately, the position of matron seems to appeal only to the nastiest women in the world. Accusing flashlights in hand, they roamed the perimeter of the children's section, now and then shining their lanterns of truth down an aisle to pin an offender.

"You there! Get your feet off the chair!" she'd yell. Any more serious infraction, say laughing, could easily get you hauled out of your seat and tossed out of the movie.

And that did not include a refund.

Worse than that, another of the matrons' functions was to insure that all children sat in the children's section. This may seem like a minor matter, but when you're between 12 and 16 -- and, therefore, paying adult admission prices -- and a pinched-faced, nasty old biddy forces you to sit with a bunch of screaming seven-year-olds packed off to the movies for the day by lazy parents, it becomes pretty unpleasant.

Actually, I remember "13 Ghosts" very well. It was the only horror film I was ever allowed to see as a child.

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PLOY

LUGOSI'S CHILDREN

Dracula. The very name conjures an image -- and most frequently, that image is one of Bela Lugosi. Not so for me. I was never permitted to watch horror movies as a child, a prohibition my mother considers eminently sensible to this day. Influenced, I suppose, by the many comic imitators of Lugosi, when I first came to view his Dracula with an adult's eyes, I found it corny and overblown. Still, the character of Dracula does hold a certain fascination for me, and the recent renaissance of interest in Vlad the Impaler has given me the opportunity to view some contemporary interpretations of the Lord of Vampires.

The major reappearance of Dracula these days is in the Broadway production, originally starring Frank Langella. It seems appropriate for a modern-day matinee idol to be playing the role originally brought to "life" (or unlife) by a heart-throb of another era. Langella certainly lives up to his sexy image, but otherwise, his interpretation -- and the entire production -- is sadly deficient.

The scenery alone ought to sound a warning note. Edward Gorey has done a beautiful job, but at the same time it sets the mood, and it's not a mood of terror. Let's face it, most homes do not feature wallpaper with a bat motif -- and in a sanitarium for mental patients, it would be in downright bad taste. What it is, of course, is campy. Fun, but campy fun. And that describes the play quite well.

Langella is certainly a fine actor, and I've admired him in a number of roles. Adept at both comedy (witness "The Twelve Chairs") and drama (he's won a Tony for Albee's "Seascape"), he nevertheless has a tendency to tread a fine line between romantic melodrama and corn when the part permits. His performancesin "The Prince of Homborg" for PBS and in a made-for-TV update of "Zorro" showed strong examples of this weakness. In "Dracula" he hams it to the hilt whenever the opportunity presents itself. His very effective interpretation of the sensual aspects of the vampire make this all the more frustrating, and the temptation to shout "play it straight!" hard to resist.

Granting the weaknesses of the play itself, which is, after all, a very romantic version of the Dracula legend, one feels that Langella could have been a great Dracula. However, within the campy confines of this particular production, he concentrates only on the sensuality of the character. Dracula's authoritativeness and arrogance are totally absent, his air of mystery is weak, as is a sense of his superior intelligence; and, most importantly, a feeling of evil is missing. Still, one can have hope for the movie version, now being filmed. Much of the campiness in "Dracula" is dependent upon interplay with the audience, certainly not possible on the screen. Should they choose to take it seriously, Langella can still make a very fine Dracula.

CHARLENE KUNKELOO

"The Passion of Dracula", now entering its third year off-Broadway, presents an interesting variation on the original theme. The supporting characters are certainly superior, with the woman (Wilhomena), now pointedly called "Willie", and one Helga Van Zandt, a psychoanalyst in residence at the sanitarium, actually having personalities -- a pleasant change from the Mina's and Lucy's of the past, whose fate at the hands of the handsome Count was perhaps better than they deserved, bland and characterless as they were. Though not without its problems, this is basically a horror-fan's Dracula, with none of the campiness of its uptown competitor. Too, the intimacy of the off-Broadway theatre is in itself more conducive to an atmosphere of terror, and the set, designed by Allen Cornell and Bob Hall (who co-authored the play), though not as stunning as Gorey's, is appropriately atmospheric and very workable, with some startling special effects that add to the mood. David Combs is presently in the lead, and makes quite an interesting Dracula.

Tall and broad, Combs is physically imposing enough to present Dracula as an individual of considerable power. There's no difficulty in believing that he can mesmerize at a glance, and the clash of wills between he and Van Helsing is particularly effective because of this. Though not as inately sexy as Langella, one does suspect that he may have tried to incorporate some facets of Langella's performance into his interpretation, while attempting a more well-rounded presentation. Certainly, it is a more serious one; Combs' approach to the character and Langella's can be distilled to their delivery of the classic line, "I never drink wine." Combs states it definitely, allowing but one extra beat between "drink" and "wine" -- just sufficient to get the point across. Langella, on the other hand, starts "I never drink," pauses, turns to to the audience, and finally adds, "wine". Still, presenting a great Dracula is a difficult accomplishment, and Combs ultimately falls short of his goal. Nevertheless, the attempt is well worth the watching.

But the very best Count Dracula of today, and, for my money, all time, is not to be found on any stage. Thankfully, PBS has preserved him for us on videotape. Louis Jourdan's interpretation of the Lord of Vampires is unequalled by any other performer. Admittedly, he has the advantage of not being confined to a stage, enabling him to first appear in Transylvania, setting the mood much better than does a English drawing room. It also allows the use of special effects of the sort not possible on a stage. But even without these accoutrements, Jourdan's performance would stand far above all others'.

All the elements of a great Dracula are here. His authority is unquestionable; when he gives an order, there is no doubt but that it will be obeyed. Here is the general of centuries ago. His arrogance is much in evidence; moreover, he manages to convince that it is natural -- he <u>is</u> superior, after all. Although he does not give his character's sensuality a position of primary importance, as does Langella, he exudes sexuality nonetheless, and successfully conveys the feeling of a tender and passionate lover, as opposed to simply a foul murderer. A sense of mystery and the fantastic is partly, it's true, established by the production itself, with its aformentioned moody settings and excellent special effects, but it is Jourdan who makes it all believable; you can watch mist coalesce into a man, but it takes the talent of a fine actor to make you <u>believe</u> it.

Jourdan also establishes the sense of a shape-changer more successfully than any other Dracula -- he is certainly the most bat-like, despite the fact that he rarely wears a cape. Indeed, his clothing is almost clerical. The frequent use of a white dog is similarly effective; Jourdan possesses an uncanny knack for convincing one that he has actually shifted from form to form.

(continued on page 10)

BLUE JAUNT

TO ROUSE THE BEAST

At the end of September, the local five-and-dimes started filling up the racks which had been featuring back-to-school specials. In place of the Big Chief tablets, and Scripto mechanical pencils and lunchpails decorated with scenes from "Star Wars", eight-inch plastic jack-o-lanterns leered at me. Skeletal hands made of cardboard beckoned to me, and dangling paper spiders tangled themselves in my hair as I walked by, until I became a willing captive of the season.

By mid-October every variety store, card shop and stationer had surrendered as many display cases and racks as possible to the creepy, the crawly, the slimey and putrescent. And even as the floor space of the merchants was being eaten up by monsters, so was America being infiltrated by entire armies of demon-inspired imps. In whispering conclaves they gathered in schoolyards, in soda shops, and on street corners. If you could get near enough to hear what they discussed, you'd fear all children had become changelings, as even innocent-looking babes made mischievous plans for the revels of Halloween.

Perhaps once upon a time people tried to catch a horror on Allhallow's Eve, but no more. Let Linus wait up for the Great Pumpkin to fly into the air...everyone else will be out there trying to be the monster of his nightmares.

Seldom has this annual metamorphosis been so easy as this year. One result of so many women returning to work is that fewer mothers have time or inclination (even if they possess the talent) to design and sew their children's costumes. Therefore, the ready-to-wear costume industry has spiraled, and a myriad of choices are available.

A child might choose to become any one of the traditional monsters, and will find several versions of devils, witches, skeletons and Frankenstein monsters to choose from, all for under $3. It is more likely, however, that he'll decide to be one of the new monsters, and the most popular sellers this year are (surprise!) the Wookiee, the Golden Robot, and Lord Darth Vader, for $3.99 each.

Where there are monsters there are monster fighters, and superhero costumes are always in vogue. 1978's favorites are the same as every year: Superman/woman, Spiderman, Batman and the Phantom. This year (as last) these traditional favorites are joined by the Bionic Woman and the Six Million Dollar Man.

Television personalities like these have become a big section of the children's costume market, and Halloween night you may expect your front door to be mobbed by characters from Saturday mornings' kids programs. Everyone is here, from Scooby Doo and Mr. Magoo, to Fat Albert, Flintstone and Woody Woodpecker. Laverne will be there (though Shirley seems to have been ignored) with Mr. Spock, Tarzan, and the Shogun Warriors. Scariest of all will be the children dressed as Killer Wasps, Lions, the Atlantis Dragon, and worst of all, the Barbie Doll.

JOYCE KATZ

These full-suit costumes are inexpensive and worth even less. In years long past, they were made of the cheapest possible grade of cheezecloth. Although it seemed impossible the product could be worsened, it has been. Most costumes are not made of cloth but flimsy plastic guaranteed to tear before the end of the evening, painted to vaguely resemble the clothes of whatever personality the costume mimics, and dependent for identity on a picture of the character painted on the chest. The similarity of the costume to the original is indeed vague, and too frequently the colors aren't even the correct choices for the character. For example, the Superman costume inexplicably has yellow trousers instead of blue; Batman is dressed in a rather ghastly shade of dark green, and even the Spiderman costume is only a parody of what it should be.

Something that is better about these costumes now than in the past, is the mask. Made of formed plastic, the mask is the key to the entire costume, and in many instances they are very convincing. In any case, they are certainly better than the starched cloth which had been used for masks and which always disintegrated before the night was over. Of course, having the mask disintegrate while you were wearing it was not without advantages. Since the dye used to paint the cloth always seemed to smear when it got damp (from prespiration, or from rain, or from finally yielding to the temptation to scarf down a chunk of candy or drink of soda while in costume) you might well find that you had a clown's large painted lips indelibly inked onto your face, providing the basis of a second costume.

But of course, these are only children's costumes, the largest of which could only accomodate a rather skinny twelve year old. For adult phantasies, there are several directions you might go in order to turn into the monster of your dreams.

The easiest and most complete transformation is, alas, also the most expensive, but the results may be worth it for one special spook's night out. A professional costumer can turn you into anything whatsoever; all you have to do is make your choice, and he'll do the rest. I priced the traditional gorilla suit, thinking it might be fun to be King Kong for a night. For around $50, plus the same amount in returnable security deposit, I could get everything except Fay Wray. The Frankenstein monster costume would be a little less, and if I opted to go out in a witch's robe or devil's suit (complete with horns, tail and pitchfork) I might actually come in with a $30-or-less price for my evening's revelry.

But with some creativity and a visit to your local magic shop, there is little limit to what you can accomplish yourself. I was especially attracted to the Dracula Kit for only $9.95, which included a cape, teeth, full makeup, and vampire blood. If I cared to spend a couple of dollars extra, I could get vampire nails, a top hat, a Dracula medal, vampire ears, a minstrel front, winged collar and white gloves. (I'd hardly know whether to bite someone, or sing "Swanee".)

In my home town when I was a child, Halloween evening would begin by us hurrying out the door after supper. Our first trek would be just around our own block when Charlotte and Carolyn, the girls next door, and I would take the tiny tots of the neighborhood from door to door to show off their costumes and fill their bags with candy. When dusk had turned to dark, the little ones had to be returned home, and then we bigger kids roamed further in our endless lust for free candy. We would always end by joining in the annual Halloween parade which marched in a ragtag line from the highschool, down Vine Street, up Broadway, and down Main Street to the Court House lawn. There the prizes would be given out. One year, my sister won for an Orphan Annie dress which Mother had sewn from the Sunday papers. Another year, my brother made a big push for a prize, wearing a long nightshirt, a nightcap, and carrying a lantern and a nightjar. Personally, my costumes always

ranged rather strongly toward gypsy girls or hobos, and my chances for prizes could probably have been improved by the hobo kit offered by Ken's Magic Shop, containing a tramp hat, hobo vest, beard, hobo cigar, and makeup.

But there are other ways to become the monster you dream of, than just dressing up on Halloween, and a visit to Korvette's toy department will impress you with all the monster devices and games that are available for this transformation.

While your pre-schooler pretends to be the Cookie Monster, you may find adult games to be your best method of working out some of your desires to be the Bad Man. "Lord of the Ring"-inspired games offer an opportunity to enter that mythos on either side of righteousness. And for every Frodo/Gandalf/Aragorn, there must be an opponent drawn from the dark powers. The LotR games are, by and large, strictly military, with small cardboard counters moved around a printed mapboard in whatever demonic plan you devise. The ultimate in the LotR game pantheon is SPI's "War of the Ring", which mixes in some elements of role-playing with the military strategy. If you're really feeling like a baddie, you can be Sauron himself.

It is in the role-playing games that you will find the most opportunity for bringing out the diabolical in your temperament. "Dungeons & Dragons" offers the potential for characters who are less than lily-white in motive. There are rules to help you play a chaotic, and the "Advanced Dungeons & Dragons" rules have specifications for half-Orcs to be used as a character class. While playing even the most pure, incidents can turn you into a vampire or a were-character, offering yet another potential for Evil.

The most opportunity for being a monster, however, is offered by the game "Monsters Monsters". In this role-playing games, the referee designs a town for the dungeon-dwellers to invade and ransack, and you of course act the part of a monster doing the pillaging.

SPI is dishing us up yet another thriller which will be in your local store this winter. It will be marketed under the name of "The Monster That Ate Sheboygan". Find someone to play Sheboygan, and let your worst instincts do the rest. In the three mid-western states that have towns named Sheboygan, the game will be marketed as "The Monster That Ate Hoboken". I'm not sure how to explain this inexplicable delicacy on the part of the game designers; nor am I quite certain how New Jersey-ites will feel about losing Hoboken.

In the end, of course, it's not how you look, but how you act, and perhaps your desire to be a monster can be satisfied by less elaborate means.

If being bad is your biggest goal, then your costumes and plans should be supplemented by that most traditional device: a large bar of ivory soap for the windows of those who don't treat. You'll probably also want a goodly supply of chalk for drawing designs and hexagrams on their sidewalks. Throwing eggs is another pretty revolting habit that won't gain you a lot of friends. A New York favorite is the can of shaving cream...a very effective and messy weapon. The newest device, though, has risen to popularity right in our own Brooklyn. Numerous teenagers carry cans of Nair to spray on the objects of their wrath — a particularly unpleasant and odorous concoction!

If you really want to be known as a monster, the oldest method is still probably the best. No complicated costume or device is necessary if you can just frighten someone.

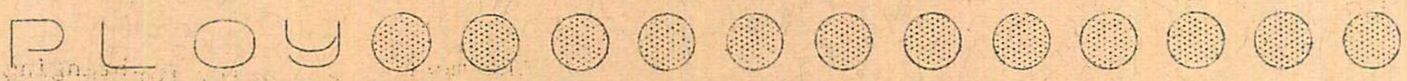
The last time I dressed up for Halloween, I put on some of my father's old clothes,

which were baggy for a five-foot-two, fifteen-year-old. I added a slouched down felt hat, then shuffled off to my best friend's house. Karen was dressing for a date when I banged on her porch screen door. As she came onto the porch, I grunted and held out a bag. She hastily unlocked the screen, threw a package of Denteen into the bag, then ran inside and slammed and locked the door.

The next day, as we walked to school, she told me how terrified she had been the night before when called on by "a really big man, at least six feet tall, and with a mean look about him."

I sympathetically made clucking noises, and offered her a piece of her own chewing gum. And I never never told her it was me.

-- Joyce Worley Katz



(continued from page 6)

Jourdan is also quite successful at conveying the intelligence of the vampire. When Van Helsing points out that here is a man who was a scholar of note centuries ago, and that time has only honed his brain, he seems to be stating the obvious.

But perhaps most importantly, here is a feeling of evil. Other Draculas have spoken of their contempt for the human race and their view of mortals as a lesser life form, but this one puts it into practice. Capable of passionately bringing Mina to the "other side" in one scene, he is equally able to then offer her to Renfield in another.

When other contemporary Draculas attack their victions, one's reaction tends to be to swear off garlic forever. Not so with Jourdan, for although the assaults are passionately moving and fascinating, the element of horror is always present. Jourdan has made us believe in what is happening on screen, and if you believe it, you must feel the revulsion.

Louis Jourdan's interpretation of Dracula will long stand as the consummate one. Every major characteristic is successfully delineated with the subtle nuances so necessary to presenting a full-blooded character provided as only a masterful performer can. This Transylvanian Count is not merely a creature of the night who must have blood to survive; he is a complex super-human being whose morality is not ours. Other Draculas may be merely sexy, or striking, or fun. This one is deep, cunning, moving. I do not believe it can be improved upon.

-- Charlene Kunkel

KATZENJAMMER

HOW GREEN WAS MY MONSTER

"Nothing can stop Hulk! Nothing!"

For every person who recalls the effect of gamma rays on man-in-the-moon marigolds — a film title of a few years ago, if you've already forgotten — a hundred know what happened when gamma rays struck a scrawny nuclear scientist named Bruce Banner. These cognoscenti are the legions of readers of Marvel's "Incredible Hulk" comic book.

Although the emerald behemoth has proven to be a late bloomer — today's success was 15 years in the making — the Hulk was actually the second character editor/writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby created in the so-called "Marvel Age" of pop culture super-doers. "Incredible Hulk" #1, sporting a May 1962 cover date, went on sale seven months after the first, trendsetting issue of "The Fantastic Four" sneaked onto the comic racks.

The "origin story", the one which tells you how the Dauntless Decorator got his power of Super Good Taste from a renegade interior designer fleeing the clutches of philistines from Beyond the Stars, is always pivotal for a comic book character. An origin sets the mood and defines the terms for what follows. The Hulk had a suitably epic nativity nicely in keeping with the larger-than-life aura surrounding the character itself.

"Alone in the desert stands the most awesome weapon ever created by man — the incredible G-bomb!" reads the first panel's caption. Then the story cuts to a blockhouse, where a team of scientists led by Dr. Bruce Banner, "the man whose genius created the G-bomb," is preparing to detonate the device.

If readers harbor any doubts about the stringbean savant, it is immediately made clear that these worries are not shared by the good old United States government. Why else would they let even a brilliant scientist test a super-weapon at a federal facility without bothering to find out what it does or how it works? Yes, I can almost hear the trusting souls at the Pentagon saying things like, "Test a new bomb at White Sands? Sure. No, no need to give us any details, Dr. Banner, what with you being such a genius and all. Sure you wouldn't like to try it out on Moline, Illinois?"

It's not really surprising that Lee expected "Incredible Hulk" readers to swallow this pollyanna view of government activity even as the first tremors of anti-Vietnam War protests were shaking college campuses. Smilin' Stan evidently felt that readers who'd accept that the Fantastic Four gained their super powers as a result of a joyride in an experimental spacecraft would believe damn near anything.

ARNIE KATZ

Even that Banner's assistant is named "Igor". Although subsequently exposed as a dastardly Russian spy, Igor had a lot of potential. He's certainly the only character in the origin story who has even the vaguest concept of the enormity of what the research team is about to do — or much curiousity about what will actually happen when Banner sets off his G-bomb.

"You fool! Nobody has checked your work!" Igor shrieks at the milksop scientist, jerking Banner around by the lapels of his lab coat to emphasize his deep concern. "If you've made an error, you might blow up half the continent!! I oughtta -- "

But Doc Banner has the answer to this line of arguement and loses no time showing Igor his proper place. "I don't make errors, Igor!" he explains. He vows to deal with his now-contrite lackey's illegal use of hands after the test.

Lest right-thinking readers fret about all the governmental benign neglect in which Banner is wallowing, General "Thunderbolt" Ross storms into the control center and tells everybody to get the lead out. He and his men have been waiting for Banner's big bang for several weeks and, presumably, are getting restive now that they've seen all the movies at the base theater.

Unfortunately, there's more flash than substance to the general's man-of-action pose. As his daughter Betty comments to Dr. Banner, General Ross' entire personality was warped many years earlier when he acquired his colorful nickname. His strong suits are blustering, foot-stomping and arm-waving, talents which leave him singularly ill-equipped to handle the Hulk over the comic book's next hundred issues.

As Dr. Banner scans the ground zero area through binoculars, he muses, "In a few seconds, we will finally learn what happens when the powerful gamma rays are released!" It's a good thing his cohorts aren't telepathic; the only thing they're counting on is the fact that at least he knows what's going to happen. Then Banner spots something: "It's a boy — a teenager! He's driving into the test area!"

After telling Igor to halt the count-down, Banner rushes off to corral the kid. "What a stroke of luck!" thinks Igor. "All I have to do is keep my finger off the hold button, and it'll be the end of Bruce Banner!" Well, that's what smartass Banner gets for trusting someone named "Igor".

At the test area, Banner finds a redheaded kid sitting in a jalopy convertible and playing his harmonica. Posterity does not yield up the name of that tune. Told that he is trespassing upon a testing range, the young man replies, "Cool it, man! the kids bet me I wouldn't have nerve enough to sneak past the guards..."

When the scientist starts dragging him to a nearby safety trench, the kid protests that now all his friends will think he's chicken. Only at the absolute moment of truth does the good doctor remember to tell the boy about the bomb. The teenager dives into the trench just as a finger stabs the firing button.

Dr. Banner isn't so lucky. The G-bomb blast catches him out in the open, unprotected. "Altho' many miles from bomb zero, Dr. Bruce Banner is bathed in the full force of the mysterious gamma rays!" says the caption. When Banner stops screaming several hours later, he is apparently unharmed. The researchers decide to keep him and the boy he saved under observation for the night.

But soon Dr. Bruce Banner becomes the Hulk for the first time — a seven-foot-tall,

half-ton bundle of uncontrollable power. The trespasser, whose name turns out to be Rick Jones, befriends the scientist in his monster guise and tags along with him through the early issues. He keeps the Hulk from getting captured too easily, points the not-so-jolly green giant at the proper baddies to destroy and, in general, keeps the big fellow on the right side of those real-life monsters of the comic book business, the folks down at the Comics Code Authority.

The Hulk's origin, with subsequent embellishments, additions and alterations in point-of-view, has been retold at least a dozen times since 1962. The details shift a bit, but the theme remains the same: eternal good samaritan Banner saves Rick Jones only to fall victim to the Ultimate Curse — turning into an unbeatable monster hounded by all and played by Lou Perrigno on television. A grisly fate, indeed.

The real-life creation of the Hulk was, like many behind-the-scenes stories, much more prosaic than the one which reached the newsstands in all its four-color glory. The character is less a startling departure from previous efforts than a skillful combining and reworking of classic monster themes.

Following the surprising success of "The Fantastic Four", Marvel needed a second superhero strip to take advantage of the sudden spurt of interest in that type of comic. Lee wanted to design a character with great physical strength, but without the cliches of the "long underwear" heroes popularized by National Periodical Publications, like Superman and Batman.

But why a monster? Several factors dictated such a choice. Apart from an abortive revival of Captain America and the Submariner in the early 1950's, most of Stan Lee's post-World War II comic book output was monster stories. It would have taken a far less imaginative man to overlook the possibility of melding the two comic book genres.

Besides, Lee already had a pretty good reason for thinking that a monster hero was exactly what his readers wanted. "It was patently apparent that the Thing was the most popular character in 'The Fantastic Four', and quite possibly in the entire comic book field," Lee remarks in "Origins of Marvel Comics". "Not only did the readers like him best, but he grabbed me, too."

Marvel's editorial mainspring took inspiration from the works of Mary Shelly — and the host of Frankenstein films. "I've always had a soft spot in my heart for the Frankenstein monster," Lee says. "No one could ever convince me that he was the bad guy, the villain or the menace. It was he who was sinned against by those who feared him, by those whose first instinct was to strike out blindly at whatever they couldn't comprehend. He never wanted to hurt anyone; he merely groped his tortuous way through a second life trying to defend himself, trying to come to terms with those who sought to destroy him."

Lee blended the alienation which permeates the "Frankenstein" canon with the dual-identity premise of "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde" to create the basic Hulk. In some ways, the Stan Lee version is reminiscent of Lon Chaney Jr.'s "Larry Talbot" character in the "Wolfman" series of movies. Nice guy Bruce Banner becomes progressively more frenzied as his best efforts fail to stem his alter ego's rampages, and his attempts at self-cure are what ultimately push the Hulk into one bloody, devastating confrontation after another. The difference is that the Wolfman is a relatively weak monster, while the Hulk is virtually impervious to harm and more than strong enough to turn the tables when the army and other nuisances get in his way.

No comic book character is easy to discuss in sweeping terms, and the Hulk is more

difficult than most. The reason is that most comics are produced by ever-changing combinations of artists and writers. Since each one attempts to put a unique stamp on his work, it's not unusual for a long-lived series like the Hulk to change characters, locales, atmosphere and even basic premises every few years.

Then, too, "The Incredible Hulk" comic book was probably not quite the smash hit Marvel would like its fans to believe; after its initial flurry of six issues, the Hulk was reduced to sharing "Tales to Astonish" first with Giant-Man and then with the Submariner until public taste caught up with the feature in 1968. Writers and artists almost always have more freedom to tinker with a modestly successful property like "The Incredible Hulk" than they would have working on "The Fantastic Four" or "Amazing Spider-man" — and even those two strips have gone through their fair share of revisions over the years.

Current readers of "The Incredible Hulk" — or even fans of the network television show — would find many similarities between today's Hulk and the one Stan Lee launched 16 years ago. They would also discover numerous changes, some central to the concept of the series.

For one thing, the convention that Banner becomes the Hulk when he is under extreme stress — one of the few elements of the comic book which has crossed over to T.V. — was a later invention. At first, the slender scientist turned into a monster every night at sundown. Not only was the Hulk about the twentieth character to use this gimmick, but it made Banner a dangerous dude to invite to Studio 54.

The writers must have invented a dozen ways for Banner to make his transformation to the Hulk, but they didn't try the stress/pulse-rate approach until the first story in the "Tales to Astonish" run. It proved to be a tonic for the character. Because Banner changed into the Hulk every time things got exciting, it threw the spotlight on the monster and relegated the physicist to the subordinate position in the strip he occupies to this day. It also gave the Hulk an excuse to bellow great lines like, "The madder Hulk gets, the stronger Hulk becomes!" while trashing evil.

And speaking of Hulk catchphrases, how much — and how well — ol' greenskin can talk has always been a bone of contention among the series' writers. In keeping with his original reason for doing the book, Stan Lee usually made jade jaws speak like a slightly more thickheaded version of the Thing. It's unfortunate that the Thing's pugnacious streak, the trait many readers find the most endearing, does not bear widening to fit the dimensions of the Hulk character. In a few of the Lee sagas, the Hulk is less an isolated, pitiable innocent than an economy-size version of the blue collar bruisers who start barroom brawls as a hobby.

Since readers are not often charmed by heroes who invariably threaten to whip any man in the house, there has been much experimentation with the Hulk's thought and speech patterns. In the search for a happy medium between making him too stupid to do anything interesting or too smart to be an authentic monster, the Hulk has sounded like everything from a retarded hod-carrier to a doctor of philosophy. Once or twice — as when Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four temporarily cured Banner in "The Incredible Hulk" #123 — he has simply been Bruce Banner in the Hulk's body. One run of stories even turned the green gargantua into a near-mindless pawn of Rick Jones.

The television show writers, in their infinite wisdom, have solved the problem by not letting the Hulk talk at all. This puts the emphasis back on the human side of the man-monster and reflects the fact that Bill Bixby is more apt to deliver his lines professionally than ex-body builder Ferrigno.

These days most comic book scribes favor having the Hulk talk and act childlike, rather than bestial or stupid, per se. It makes the jade giant a more likable character and seems to jibe better with the personality of the Hulk as it has developed in the 1970's. Says an anonymous editorialist in "The Incredible Hulk" #232: "The Hulk is quite simply the blundering, brutal child — a rampaging, infantile id, if you will — that Bruce Banner had held in check until the day when the mutating effects of the gamma rays created two beings where there had been one."

If you're still not convinced that Marvel has always fiddled with the Hulk, ponder this. at the very start, everyone's favorite green monster wasn't even green. The Hulk was supposed to be a somber gray in the first issue of his comic book, but coloring errors resulted in chameleon-like variations in the brute's skin tones. By sheer coincidence, the Hulk was even rendered as bright green in one panel of the origin story.

Lee knew a change of hue was needed in time for the second issue, if only because he couldn't come up with any good alliterative nicknames using grey. He finally settled on green, perhaps to avoid confusion with the orange rockpile look of the Thing.

And, finally, there's the dreary business of Dr. Banner's first name. Hulkophiles who cringed when the television show rechristened the scientist "David Banner" may be unaware that this wasn't the first time such a thing has happened. Stan Lee made the mistake of calling Banner "Bob" in a couple of stories and was forced to fall back on the excuse that the scientist's fullname is "Robert Bruce Banner" to pacify eagle-eyed Marvel readers.

The Hulk may well be the world's leading innocent, but that naivete is wedded to limitless destructive power and a young child's narrow understanding of the world around him. To the Hulk, all motivations are equally unfathomable; the man-monster lives in a perpetual "now" in which dangers appear to rear up on all sides to threaten him.

And, of course, big greenie is always in danger. He's a serious contender for Candide's title of "greatest literary patsy".

Certainly no character in comic book history has been lied to, cheated, tricked, betrayed, trapped and suckered more often than the Hulk. Unlike Candide, however, the Hulk is no punching bag. When the Hulk gets mad, he gets even — and so what if he has to level a small city or an air force base in the process?

Even when people befriend him, like Matt (Daredevil) Murdoch, who defended the Hulk in court against the various criminal charges which had piled up over the years, the good samaritan generally ends up as an unwitting tool in some scheme to further humiliate ol' greenskin.

A very early Stan Lee script set the pattern for the dozens upon dozens of similar stories to follow. In it, General Ross tricks Rick Jones into believing that the United States needs someone with the monster's iron constitution to test an experimental space rocket.

Swelled by patriotic fervor, Jones lures the monster into the rocket, only to have the general try to dispose of the Hulk by sending him on a one-way spaceflight to the far end of the universe. The teenager manages to abort the trip, but an experience like that would make even an intellectual lightweight like the Hulk a bit more cynical about the joys of friendship.

Soldiers are the Hulk's special bete noire. Fellow liberals may choose to believe

that the military budget has soared out of sight because of cost-overruns by suppliers of hardware for the armed forces, but readers of the "Incredible Hulk" know that the increased appropriations are actually used to replace the war material the Hulk demolishes each month.

Since the very first time Bruce Banner turned into the Hulk, someone in uniform has always been pointing a weapon at him with murderous intent. And when Gen. Ross and Dr. Banner finally made their peace, there were other villains in khaki like Col. Armbrister to take up the endless war against the big fellow.

Even the Hulk eventually gets the point when it's pounded home with a nuclear warhead. Today the Hulk displays an antipathy to The Modern Army which must give nightmares to the nation's recruiting officers. "Soldiers! Always soldiers! Why won't soldiers leave Hulk alone?" the rampaging one asks in "The Incredible Hulk Annual" #5 when he blunders into Ft. Carson, Colo., home of the 3rd Armor Division.

Naturally, the G.I.'s attack, irritating the Hulk no end in the process. "Listen to Hulk, humans! Hulk does not want to fight!" the monster explains while a squad peppers him with bazooka rockets. "Hulk never wants to fight! Hulk only wants to be left in peace! So leave Hulk in peace, humans — or Hulk will smash you all!"

When the troops fail to heed this well-intentioned warning, the monster proves to be as good as his word. He pounds the ground to produce a mini-earthquake which levels his tormenters and ends the battle. This irritation out of the way, the Hulk proceeds to the story's important work, polishing off six humdrum monsters from Marvel's pre-superhero days with names like Groot, Coom and Blip.

Of course, the Hulk isn't too fond of anyone else, either. Sticks and stones can't break his bones, but words can certainly harm the emerald giant. The big fellow has suffered society's wrath so often that, in his twilit mind, peace simply means an absence of human beings. The Hulk's rare interludes of tranquility almost always come in the forbidding wastes of the American desert, the trackless plains of the frozen North, or on the subatomic planet where he met — and lost — his true love, the green-skinned sorceress/princess Jarella.

This misanthropic streak should have made the Hulk a poor candidate for membership in a super hero team, but that hasn't stopped Marvel from trying — twice. As you've probably guessed, a lot of this persistance stems from the economic realities of comic book publishing. Books which feature a conglommeration of good guys depend on the appear of the individual stars to sell the title. Since the Hulk has always — at least until the current boom — been under-utilized in terms of the character's popularity, the man-monster's inclusion in such a strip sounds like a natural sales-builder.

Marvel's first, ill-fated effort to make use of the Hulk in this fashion occurred in September 1963 when Lee and Kirby included him in the roster of their new super group, the Avengers. The Hulk actually provides the catalyst for the group's formation, since it is Loki's scheme to control the man-beast which draws Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp together to thwart the plans of Asgard's less-than-favorite son.

The Hulk was little more than a guest star rather than a true member of the team in first three isues of "The Avengers". The reason is that the brutish, dull-witted Hulk of that era was totally out of place in the polite society of the Avengers. Somehow, it's impossible to imagine the monster lolling around Avengers Mansion between adventures, playing cards with Iron Man while ogling the Wasp's nay-nays.

I suspect the Avengers breathed a collective sigh of relief when jade jaws bounded into the sunset during the fourth issue. The Avengers are so comradely, yet so damnably sincere about fighting Evil, that the Hulk could never have become very popular with the rest of the gang.

On the other hand, ol' greenskin has worked out splendidly as a member of the world's greatest non-team, the Defenders. Writer Roy Thomas and artist Ross Andru brought together the Hulk, Submariner and Dr. Strange — all they needed was Greta Garbo to make a proper foursome of recluses — for the first issue of "Marvel Feature", dated December 1971. (Since "Marvel Feature" was a double-size try-out book, the origin story ran 19 pages. There was a double bonus of a Submariner reprint and a new Dr. Strange 10-pager explaining how he once more acquired the mystic powers he'd renounced in "The Incredible Hulk" #126.)

The first Defenders adventure concerns a former enemy of Dr. Strange known as Yandroth, the scientist supreme. The mage had last seen this buffoon falling endlessly through a world that never was. As the story opens, Dr. Strange receives a mystic call which leads him to a hospital room where he finds a dying Yandroth. The erstwhile Scientist Supreme has a story for Dr. Strange: "But — I stopped falling eventually — found myself amid a cosmos totally alien to my science-trained senses — a world where Euclid had never trod — and Einstein was a deluded child—"

Yandroth has used this period of exile only too well; he's designed a machine called the Omegatron. This mammoth device, decorated with a picture of Yandroth's less-than-perfect face, has only one purpose: it will speak Yandroth's name once when the scientist dies, and then five hours later, detonate every nuclear stockpile on earth. "Every man wants the world to end when he dies—but only I shall fulfill that dream!" Yandroth gloats.

Since his powers are insufficient to breach the doomsday machine's magical and scientific defenses, Strange goes recruiting. He first visits the Submariner, but finds Namor absorbed in a private quest. But when the Avening Son learns that the world will be wiped out in five hours, he joins Strange to insure that he'll have enough time to finish his own errand.

Strange and Namor magically scan the world for allies. The Silver Surfer is indisposed, but the Hulk is just wandering the wide open spaces. In an inexplicable lapse in logic, Strange astrally projects to the Hulk's vicinity, despite the fact that he is undetectable in this insubstantial form.

By a stroke of luck -- or so Thomas tells us — the Hulk is an exception due to his bestial nature. Using a dash of psychology, Strange riles the brute and then gets the Hulk to follow the astral image by telling him not to do so. "No one tells Hulk what to do!" the monster thunders. "Hulk will follow you — hound you — 'til one of us gets tired. And — Hulk never gets tired!"

Once the mage has led the Hulk to where he and Namor are waiting, ol' Greenskin sets about erasing his tormenter with a boulder. Namor deflects this missile, and Strange rings the monster with a cage of lightning bolts to stop the assault.

"Will you cease your struggles, monster — and listen to us?" Namor asks.

"Hulk will stop — Hulk will listen," the beast replies. "But just for a minute."

Dr. Strange banishes the lightning and says to the man-monster, "Hulk — you walked with Namor once before, and he found you many foes to fight. This time, he and I vow you

will find glories in plenty in battle — if you come with us. Well? What say you?"

"Hulk doesnt see much glory in fighting — just wants people not to bother him. But— if you want to be Hulk's friend...Hulk will go with you," the brute explains.

Dr. Strange, taken aback by this disarming speech, replied, "Then—a frined is what I shall be, behemoth — a friend to you — and to the earth!"

After reaching the Omegatron, Dr. Strange solves the dilemma by dilating time around the device. Whole eras will actually pass during each second of the machine's countdown, so that the five hours to detonation will not pass until the end of time.

"Too confusing for Hulk," says the green giant after Strange tried to explain the solution to him. "Hulk will go now — someplace he can be alone!"

"Aye — it is best that we part," Namor echoes. "For, we all but caused the earth's destruction — while we sought to be its valiant defenders!"

"Defenders! A fitting name for such a grouping as we — if we've ever need to meet again," Dr. Strange muses.

"Hulk never wants to get together again. Never!" The Hulk is definitely a monster with a mind of his own. "Hulk was in group once — called Avengers. Didn't like it."

Despite his initial cynicism, the Hulk did grow to like hanging around with the Defenders. The group's membership has changed many times — Dr. Strange and Submariner are not currently in the strip — but the Hulk remains the non-team's big green bulwark. He provides a generous share of the muscle and quite a bit of the satire.

Though the Hulk genuinely adores his powerful allies — many plots turn on the fact that the Hulk will do anything for a friend — his childlike mind has a lot of trouble with their super hero posturings. So he calls Dr. Strange "dumb magician" and Nighthawk "bird-nose" in between tries at saving their bacon.

The story of comic book-dom's greatest monster literally has no ending. Marvel never rests on its laurels, and there's no doubt that countless adventures still await ol' green-skin. What with the television show, the monthly "Incredible Hulk", the bi-monthly "Defenders", and now a whole large-size magazine devoted to his adventures, the Hulk has a busy future to look forward to. So rather than end with some sweeping generality about the man-monster, let's instead close with a phrase which has appeared at the end of uncountable Hulk takes —

"To be Hulk-tinued!"

-- Arnie Katz

POWER SQUARE

DARK OLYMPUS

Question: What are the Ten Best horror films of all time?

Determined to arrive at an answer, I first established the ground rules. What, for instance, do I mean by "horror film"? Answer: any piece of cinema where the primary purpose is to horrify, terrify or shock. More often than not, there's a monster in the middle of it, but there doesn't have to be.

Strictly speaking, of course, both "The Thing" and "The Incredible, Shrinking Man" — both on the list — are science fiction. But because of the way in which these films dealt with the theme — their intent — they qualify under my definition, whereas "Forbidden Planet", another sf film classic, which also contained a "monster", would not. "Forbidden Planet" certainly has its scarey moments, but its intent was to stimulate the sensawunder, thus eliciting a scientifictional response.

(One more thing — I realize now that I shouldn't even be using the word "film" exclusively, as "Count Dracula" was actually recorded on videotape. Therefore, any cinematic recording intended primarily to frighten its audience, stands or falls as a "horror movie".

Here, then, in no particular order, are the Ten Best:

THE WEREWOLF OF LONDON By 1935, the genre's classic types had already been established in the cinema. We had seen Lugosi's vampire, Lionel Atwill's mad doctor, Karloff's mummy and his Frankenstein's monster. We had even seen, in King Kong, the quintessential giant monster, raging through a modern metropolis. Only the werewolf had yet to stalk the silver screen, and it remained for this English masterpiece to finally explore the rich vein of horror connected with lycanthropy.

The man who becomes an animal is perhaps the oldest resident of the monster pantheon, older than the vampire, and positively ancient beside the laboratory-bred scion of science. (And, of course, when they laid their rulers to rest back in olde-time Egypt, they probably had no idea that they would rise again, centuries later, a staple of the horror-film canon.) Of course, it wasn't always a wolf. In Africa, there were stories of lion and panther men (as well as women, an idea often explored in the cinema of the fantastic;) India had its elephant men, and in places such as Russia tales were told of human beings assuming the shape of a bear. The legend of the Changeling is one of mankind's most potent myths, and in films alone, men have transformed into bats, bugs, fish, dogs, cats, lizards, snakes and flies, among other things. But the true terror lies not in complete transition, but in retaining some small portion of our human souls, as well. The beasts do not know, after all, that they are beasts.

"The werewolf is neither man nor beast, but a satanic creature, comprising the worst elements of both," a suave Dr. Yogami (Warner Oland) grimly informs Henry Hull's high society botanist. For Hull was recently bitten by just such a creature while searching the

BILL KUNKEL

Himalayas for a very rare flower — the Marifesa Lupina Lumina, a queer white specimen that blooms only by moonlight. Yet, perhaps, hits Yogami, it is much more — perhaps, it is the fabled cure for werewolfry, itself!

Hull can take no chances, for if the Oriental is correct, within a week he will fall prey to the disease, at the rising of the full moon. Working furiously, he developes a special "moon lamp" that generates artificial lunar light, thus bringing the Marifesa to bloom much sooner. And so, on that first night, Hull empties the house of wife and servants and prepares to face the unknown, secure in the knowledge that two of the Marifesas have already bloomed. He enters the library and selects a book on "Legendary Monsters", and settles down. Slowly, through a large bay window, we see the pale, white eye rising along the horizon. His cat reacts first, scratching and hissing, reacting as if to a mortal enemy. Confused and hurt, the doctor pulls back from his pet, and falls directly into the gaze of the now fully-risen moon. Hands clutching at his throat, gagging and choking, he jerks loose his collar. In thrall now to that cold lunar eye, he bolts toward the door. We watch him from the side, in a masterfully staged transformation scene, as he passes behind a series of pillars, each one obscuring him from view for a single step. And with each reappearance, he becomes more lupine, a snarling lycanthropus, quickly losing his last vestiges of human control.[1] He hurries frantically to the laboratory, only to find both blooms are now gone — stolen! Growling in animal frustration, he throws on a hat, coat and scarf, and flees into the London night. And always in the back of his mind are Yogami's words: "The werewolf always seeks to kill that which it loves best."

By the standards of the day, Henry Hull's performance was fairly restrained, but even as a child, I found portions too excessively mannered to be taken with total seriousness. Still, he is the most effective werewolf ever realized, in that he retained so much of his humanity — and seemed all the most "satanic" for it. He could even speak, something wolf men have never done (the only exception being "Andreas" from "Return of the Vampire", the tragic thrall of the undead Armand Tessler—played to Dracula-like perfection by a still-young Lugosi—and he was a secondary character in the film.) It was this quality that I always found lacking in Chaney Jr.'s Lawrence Talbot — his werewolf was such a totally bestial, almost alien creature, I could sense no connection between man and beast. The severe make-up allowed nothing of Talbot to show through. For all the resemblance, the werewolf might have been played by another actor entirely, but for the chilling transformation scenes.

As "Werewolf of London" draws to its conclusion, the time of the full moon is again upon the cursed botanist, and he bursts into his laboratory, only to discover a thief again stealing his precious flower — it is Yogami! "It was you!" Hull hisses, realizing that the Oriental was the creature who attacked him in Tibet.

Yogami grins, cheshire-like, and injects the bloom into his hand. "Sorry I can't share this with you!" he gloats, discarding the now-dead Marifesa. But Yogami has forgotten that, without the flower to hold back the beast, his adversary will soon be a man no longer. Hull, already in the process of changing, leaps at his enemy's throat, brutally killing him and hurling him, doll-like, against the wall. He then sets out to find his wife.

The idea of a "moon flower" was never again used, but it made a sterling MacGuffin here. The entire structure of the film is different from the werewolf flicks that were to come. The Talbot series always moved in straightforward fashion, through exceedingly un-

[1] This cinematic device proved so effective, it was later employed in an episode of "Twilight Zone" — "The Howling Man" scripted by Charles Beaumont.

cluttered plots. But here we witnessed twists and turns, and a dozen interesting characters along the way. Only the much later "Curse of the Werewolf", with Oliver Reed (a Hammer production based on Guy Endore's much-neglected classic, "The Werewolf of Paris") provided such a fresh look at the subject. And never again would we be treated to so fascinating a lycanthrope as Warner Oland's Dr. Yogami.

THE BLACK CAT Edgar G. Ulmer's atmospheric masterpiece of the macabre was the first vehicle to co-feature Karloff and Lugosi, as well as the only Hollywood horror movie to ever successfully integrate the shadowy style of the classic European cinema.

Ulmer, former assistant to F.W. Murnau ("Nosferatu") told a story of two men, involved in a "game of death", Lugosi as Dr. Vitus Werdegast, and Karloff as the suavely satanic Engineer Hjalmar Poelzig. Vitus is returning after fifteen years to a place called Marmaros, a fortress which had been commanded by Poelzig during the First World War. Yet, apparently, the Engineer (a military title in certain middle-European countries) betrayed his comrades, then thousand of whom died there. Vitus, however, was taken prisoner, and now finds that Poelzig has constructed a weird, futuristic mansion on the horrible site. As he approaches the home of his old enemy, the bus driver announces: "Tens of thousands died here. That ravine was piled twelve deep with dead and wounded men. A stream of blood ran here. And that hill yonder, where Engineer Poelzig now lives, was the sight of Fort Marmaros. He built his home on its very foundations. Marmaros, the greatest graveyard in the world!"

But there is more than simple betrayal between these two. Poelzig took Vitus' wife and child, telling them that he had died at Marmaros, and now Vitus demands to know where they are.

"Dead."

And now the game begins in earnest. But Vitus cannot play openly, for there are innocents involved — a young couple, forced to seek refuge at Poelzig's home. It is soon obvious that the woman has been selected by Poelzig for some sinister purpose.

"Tonight is the dark of the moon," the evil Engineer informs Werdegast. "Do you dare play chess for the girl?" He plays...and loses.

The final third of the film moves through a dark and shadowy labyrinth of madness, devil worship and torture, with an actual Black Mass performed on camera. Finally, Vitus achieves his long-awaited revenge, as he rescues the innocent girl and then lures Poelzig into the underground laboratory where Thamal, Vitus' massive servant, strings up the sinister necromancer, and exacts his repayment. ("Do you know what I'm going to do with you now? Did you ever see an animal skinned? That's what I'm going to do — tear the skin from your body...slowly...bit by bit!") By now, Vitus too is hopelessly insane, as obsessed by this game of death as ever Poelzig was.

Supposedly based on the short story by Poe, this film is actually a totally original screen treatment. (There is a black cat, and Vitus, we are told, has a terrible fear of felines, but this plot twist is never explored further.) Ulmer did little work for Universal beyond this classic, but he has achieved a certain cult status for his many memorable B-movies made for smaller studios, such as Monogram. A truly unique journey into previously uncharted film territory.

DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN Sequels are generally regarded as inferior stuff, but two of them have made this Ten Best list. For cynics, the rule of thumb has always been: film makers take the worst elements of the original as the foundation of the

for the sequel. Not so here, as Vincent Price reprises his greatest characterization — the mad Anton Phibes.

In the original, "The Abominable Dr. Phibes", we learned that he was a Master of the art of Acoustical Science, lecturing in Europe when word reached him that his beloved wife lay dying in a London hospital. Racing home, his auto crashes, bursts into flames and explodes. A body, charred beyond recognition, is recovered, and the doctor declared legally dead. But that body was his driver's, as Phibes escaped the conflagration, barely alive and hopelessly disfigured. He then took a house in London's poshest district, and set about to kill each nurse and doctor who was present when his wife died. He keeps her body, meanwhile, eternally preserved in a crystal casket, waiting for the day when he will revive her!

As the original concludes, Phibes lays down beside her, flips a switch and goes into suspended animation. His blood drains through a series of intricate tubing, to be replaced by preservative fluids. Then, the process complete, the floor draws over the lifeless couple, hiding them until the time is right for their revival...

That time comes as the credits rise for this fantastic followup flick. The stars have come into a certain alignment, tripping a switch that signals the reversal of the life-suspension process. Phibes rises, and transports himself and his late wife to Egypt where they will sail down the River of Life! Ah, but there's a fly in the ointment, for a certain incredibly wealthy British nobleman (Robert Quarry) is also in search of that sacred waterway, and he too has taken notice of the stars.

Like the original, this film combines satire, magic and outright horror in a savagely entertaining mix. Again, Phibes' robot orchestra (called "Clockwork" musicians) makes ragtime music (the films are set in the 20's, with excellent period effects) while Price dances with his mystically conjured female servant, all the while eliminating members of Quarry's expedition in some of the grisliest sequences ever filmed.

Throughout both movies, it's the little touches that constantly delight, such as Phibes' delicious hideaway beneath a mammoth pyramid. Even the most macabre murders bring a chuckle, as the class behind this production tells and tells and tells. The finale, with Phibes and wife sailing on a raft down the River of Eternal Life, while "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" swells in the background, is an unalloyed delight.

THE THING (FROM ANOTHER WORLD) From this one's nerve-tingling credits, with the title etched in flame across an abyss, to the breathless conclusion, with newsman Scotty (Douglas Spencer) imploring all within the sound of his voice to "Watch the skies! Keep watching the skies!", "The Thing" is a one-of-a-kind classic.

Based on John Campbell's "Who Goes There?", the film did away with the concept of a shape-changing alien and how to uncover him, and went instead directly to the heart of the matter: an invasion from the stars. Maybe the post-WW II era wasn't the most paranoid in the history of mankind, but it'll do, and this one movie masterpiece played upon the fears and newly-forming cosmic doubts of America as well as anything before or since.

Journeyman director Christian Nyby worked closely with producer Howard Hawks (indeed, he had been Hawks' film editor) to produce a film as tough, as claustrophobic, and as tense as anything the master himself has ever done. The story is simple. A group of people face a challenge, isolated by an unyeilding environment. A being from another world has landed near a scientific outpost at the North Pole, cut off from civilization by a terrible blizzard. Present are the scientists — the men of ideas — and a group of Air Force personnel

dispatched before the store — they are the men of action. The conflict, then, is not only between the "thing", which is breeding more of its kind in the station's greenhouse, and the human beings off whom it feeds, but between the scientists and the soldiers. Dr. Carrington (Robert Cornwaite) feels they must communicate with it. Capt. Pat Hendry (Kenneth Toby) however, plans only to destroy it. The film clearly sides with Hendry in this ideological struggle, with the scientists depicted as unrealistic if well-intentioned fools.

The screenplay, credited to Charles Lederer (but apparently rewritten at some point by Ben Hecht) is tough, taut stuff, complete with overlapping dialogue and situations so packed with tension they seem about to explode. These lines are delivered like machine gun fire by a stirringly competent cast. But the stand-out performance was delivered by an actor who spoke not a line — James Arness as the hulking, violent but clever, alien intruder.

The photography, by Russel Harlan, achieves startling effects. Seemingly shot through a black & white haze, all the elements — the cold, the confinement, the sheer terror of the situation — come across with shocking verisimilitude.

Dimitri Tiomkin's heart-stopping score becomes an integral part of the ongoing action, rather than simply a comment upon it. The most terrifying moments are made all the more so by Tiomkin's sound track, wailing to a crescendo, sounding like a cross between a mewling cat and a demented tuning fork, vibrating and howling up and down the scale.

Hawks hoped, at the time, that science fiction could become an extremely viable film genre, much as the western had. Indeed, he saw many similarities between his new project and the many cowboy epics he had already directed. But it was not to be. Quoting Chris Steinbrunner: "Even though 'The Thing' inspired imitations at other studios, it did not open 'the vast new story markets' and push through the exploration of new, different plots that Hawks had envisioned. Instead, Hollywood soon went back to the 'out-and-out horror thriller' of the old school — safer, cheaper, tried and true. This is why 'The Thing From Another World' stands all the more isolated in the cinema of the fantastic."

COUNT DRACULA Of the myriad versions of Bram Stoker's venerable vampire saga, this recent Britist version, presented in the United States over PBS, is not only the most faithful, it is also the most effective.

Videotape is a difficult medium, wherein the slightest artificial effect becomes magnified to potentially ruinous proportions. But here, director Phillip Saville manages to overcome videotape's "naked" feel, while capitalizing on its many special effect capabilities (particularly effective is a scene wherein Dracula toys with a mirror in which he casts no reflection).

Louis Jourdan's Dracula is a most chilling creation, whether crawling, bat-like, down the castle wall, or draining a victim in the middle of a graveyard. His Count seduces Mina while her husband, Jonathan, lays beside her, kept asleep by vampiric power. It is difficult to rouse pity for this soulless villian, but impossible to deny him respect. In the game of cat-and-mouse between him and his pursuers, he is ever the cat — even to his destruction.

Powerful, intelligent, sensual — Jourdan delivers the traditional lines ("The children of the night -- what music they make..")with understated aplomb, and never resorts to cape-wielding theatrics (in fact, he is rarely seen in a cape at all, as costume designer Ken Morey chose, wisely, to dress him in a cassock, giving him the look of a defrocked priest.

The script, by Gerald Savory, is literate and exciting, playing up Dracula's various

abilities to the hilt (he not only climbs walls, and turns into a bat, but can also become as mist, and shape-change into a white German Shepherd.) "Count Dracula" was broadcast in three, hour-long episodes, thus making it the longest version ever. This freedom from the clock enabled the film-makers to dramatize portions of Stoker's classic for the first time, such as the thrilling finale at the Borgo Pass.

Fine production values, an expert cast (Frank Finlay's Van Helsing being especially successful) and an intelligent script — this is the "Count Dracula" — and likely to remain so for quite some time.

KING KONG "The Eighth Wonder of the World" they called him, and so he was. Anyone who remains doubtful as to the true stature of this classic shocker, has only to check out Dino DeLaurentis' unspeakable 1976 remake. In the original, everything worked; the talents of Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack, Edgar Wallace, Max Steiner, Marcel Delgado, and the great Willis O'Brien, among others, combined to create the ultimate, large-scale fantasy masterpiece.

The conception was Cooper's, the daredevil documentary film-maker who had previously stunned the movie-going public with the breathtaking jungle footage of "Chang". Before "Kong", he had always worked on location, creating his cinema-verite adventures as he went along. But now, like his alter-ego, Carl Denim, he wanted to do something...bigger. A gorilla was a natural. Since the emergence of Darwinism, years earlier, the ape had been an obsession with Americans. The twenties had seen a score of ape-men and killer simians (most harboring disturbing sexual and racial overtones as, of course, did Kong itself.)

"But Kong transcends all the gorilla plays that preceeded it," wrote Chris Steinbrunner in "Cinema of the Fantastic", "for it is finer, nobler, and made of different stuff: the ingredient is love...Kong...was not designed to disgust, rape or kill. And his death is not a triumphant climax, but a tragedy."

Famed mystery writer Edgar Wallace, then under contract to RKO, wrote the original screen treatment, borrowing extensively from O'Brien's silent version of "The Lost World". But Wallace died before filming began, and Schoedsack's wife, Ruth Rose, along with James Creelman, reworked his ideas into a screenplay full of depression-era he-men, hustlers, and one perfect, helpless and eternally desirable woman. The film is certainly a child of its time. One the night of Kong's stage debut, Denim (Robert Armstrong) strides before the packed house and speaks to them. "He was a king in the world he knew, but now he comes before you, a show, to gratify your curiousity!" Much of the dialogue, especially in the beginning, is so corny it invariably provokes guffaws when shown on college campuses. But, those were corny times, and in the context of this film, even the con men possess a charming naivete.

Kong himself was a creation of the great French model sculptor, Marcel Delgado, although a full-size head, arm and foot were constructed for a few, special scenes. Working with a steel skeleton, Delgado's great ape was only twelve inches high, but capable of movement and facial expressions so sophisticated that, even after the special effects secrets were revealed, the belief persisted that Kong was an actual life-size robot, operated from within by several workmen.

But if the concept was Cooper's, the technical triumph was Willis O'Brien's. He constructed Skull Island entirely in miniature, on a tabletop layout in his garage, then began filming, one frame at a time, in the expensive and time-consuming process known as "stop-motion animation". Volumes have been written on both his technique and his genius, but although O'Brien would finally receive an Oscar for the 1949 "Mighty Joe Young", he never

again found such a perfect vehicle for his prodigious talent as this strange tale of a woman, and the gigantic monkey who loved her.

The cast was perfect. Bruce Cabot's Jack Driscoll, a delightfully droll muscle-brained 30's hero, is possessed of undeniable courage; Robert Armstrong's Denim is supremely believable, confident to the point of foolhardiness, the huckster supreme who went out looking for the biggest thing anyone had ever seen — and then found it. But when you get right down to it, it's Fay Wray, the ultimate American beauty, who steals the film as well as Kong's heart.

Even the secondary characters were cast by Cooper with obvious skill and care. Frank Reicher's Captain Englehart, Noble Johnson's Native King (who utters the immortal lines: "Kong Cowbesi — Cowbesi por Kong!" in a rich, booming baritone, forever declaring Ann Darrow as Kong's woman), and Steve Clemento's Witch Doctor are all superb.

Behind all the drama, however, there is the score — Kong's heartbeat, as interpreted by Max Steiner. Before Kong, no major fantasy film had even used music, other than for main and end titles, with that usually borrowed from the classics. So, Hollywood's first great composer approached this landmark film with the intention of providing a score that would "illuminate action with sound". It took him just two weeks, and of his work on this film, Oscar Levant has said, "It offered him the opportunity to write the kind of music no one had ever heard before, or since. Full of weird chords, strident background noises, rumblings and heavings...it was always my feeling that it should have been advertised as a concert of Steiner's music, with accompanying pictures on the screen." Then RKO's resident musical director, Steiner would go on to compose over 100 film scores, but none more effective than his work here.

At the end, as Kong is beseiged from all sides, we see that one of the pilots is Merian C. Cooper himself. "Let's go kill the son of a bitch," he is reported to have said, before taking off to film the air scenes for the finale. But he never made it. The airplanes, as every child knows, did not kill Kong. No. 'Twas Beauty killed the beast.

BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN James Whale's sequel to his classic "Frankenstein" is actually a superior, better-realized film on all levels. Equipped with a hefty budget, Whale did this one up royal for "Uncle" Carl Laemmle, then the King of Universal. The sets, the performances, the script — in every way, it surpasses its predecessor.

William Hurlbut's script took up where "Frankenstein" left off — almost. At the conclusion of the original, Henry had survived his ordeal with admirable style. Even after being dumped from the windmill, he was up and about by the final credits. But as "Bride" begins, we see Henry being brought home to die, while the villagers are reluctantly dispersed from the monster's inferno of a tomb. But the creature has survived, and kills two more villagers as he flees the burning windmill. (Ironically, the villagers are the parents of the little girl who died at the monster's hands in the original.)

Henry, meanwhile, slowly recovers, ponding his fate and concluding it was just punishment for tampering with the forces of nature. "I've been cursed," he says, "for delving into the mysteries of life." But a strange visitor soon shakes Frankenstein's resolve to quit the creation biz. The visitor, of course, is the unforgettable Dr. Praetorius (played to perfection by Ernest Thesiger.) He too, it seems, has penetrated the secret of life, and he is anxious for Frankenstein to see his results — perfect miniature creatures that he has actually "grown" like plants. He keeps his tiny creations in bell jars, and has given them each a personna: the amorous king and his reluctant queen, a satanic figure, a ballerina, and another ("this one looked so disapprovingly at the others, Praetorius explains, "that I made him an archbishop.")

Frankenstein is astounded — and appalled. But Praetorius has a trump card. One night while out robbing graves, he discovered Henry's creation, now living in the cemetery and able to speak, in a crude fashion, after a brief, idyllic interlude with a blind hermit (a scene parodied to hilarious effect in Mel Brooks' "Young Frankenstein".) Praetorius has tutored the creature, and in exchange for its help in "convincing" Frankenstein to collaborate with him, he promises it a mate.

Giving the creature a voice added to its depth, and Whale stinted on nothing, as this film's production values are consistently excellent. It was the last of the great "Frankenstein" films. It was also Whale's last, though Karloff made one more, the expensively mounted, but otherwise disappointing "Son of Frankenstein".

"I could see that the creature was becoming a prop," Karloff later explained, "strapped to a surgical table until the final reel." But never was the creature better used than in this magnificent horror classic.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN The most cosmic horror movie of all time, thanks to a fine screenplay, excellent visual effects, and a directing job that was nothing less than brilliant.

The screenplay was courtesy of Richard Matheson (based on his novel, "The Shrinking Man"), and told the story of Scott Carey, an average Joe, who finds himself thrown into a madman's nightmare, with no chance to wake up. On a small boat with his wife, vacationing off the California coast, Scott is exposed to a strange, cloudlike substance. Weeks pass, and his clothes no longer fit him properly, he's losing weight and becoming increasingly nervous. Checking with his physician, he is assured that occasional weight loss is common. A routine height check, however, discloses a much less prosaic bit of information — Scott has shrunk almost four inches!

His terrible dilemma takes on grim proportions as he continued to get smaller, with all of science unable to reverse the strange malady. Scott's desperate attempts to cope with his new status make fascinating dramatic meat, especially in a sequence wherein Scott joins the circus, posing as a dwarf — the doctors seem to have at least halted his shrinking — and has a touching romantic interlude with the tiny Clarice. But then he beings to shrink anew, so he returns home for his ultimate confrontation with destiny. Trapped in his own cellar, menaced by a now-gigantic spider, Scott must continually prove to himself that he is still a man, still a human being, in spite of what he's become.

Finally, he grows so small that he can walk through the spaces in a window screen, stepping out into a brave new world where no other human has ever walked.

"So close," he marvels, "the infinitesimal and the infinite. The two ends of the same concept, the unbelievably small and the unbelievably vast eventually meet, like the closing of a gigantic circle."

He moves further now into his perception of relativity, as the background shifts into an alien landscape. "To God," he decides, "there is no zero. I still exist!" By now, we no longer see him.

The shrinking effect was achieved, early on in the film, through the use of outsized furniture and props, but as Scott becomes smaller, some first rate process shots are employed — especially in his titanic struggle with the spider.

But the truly classic accomplisment was the ending — pretty far out in 1957 — and it

was all Jack Arnold's doing. The studio wanted a happy ending. Matheson balked. But Arnold, veteran director of such movies as "Creature From the Black Lagoon" and "It Came From Outer Space", had a solution, what Ed Naha called "the ultimate happy ending", with Scott exploring the boundaries of perception, his consciousness expanding as his body diminishes. Definitely, one of the great ones.

FRANKENSTEIN — THE TRUE STORY Television lives and breathes in "trends". It is a medium fanatically devoted to attaining success without taking any of the risks usually involved in such enterprises. In the early 70's, the three major networks got onto a new kick: made-for-TV movie adaptations of classic horror stories. CBS gave us Jack Palance, a sensitive but perhaps overly-sentimental "Dracula", while ABC and "Dark Shadows" director Dan Curtis tried their hand at "Frankenstein". We saw two versions of "Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde", one fairly straightforward, with Jack Palance in the title roles; the other, presenting Kirk Douglas as the schizoid scientist, was a musical treatment that never recovered from the viewers' inability to take a singing, dancing monster seriously. Then, in 1974- NBC got into the act. A new adaptation of the Mary Shelley classic was chosen for big budget treatment — lavish sets, a first-rate cast, and a new slant on the story. As director, they chose Jack Smight, who had previously bungled a number of promising assignments (most notably, Bradbury's "Illustrated Man"), but who was obviously eager to try his hand at the great saga of man and monster.

The result was a flawed masterpiece. Broadcast in two parts, they are quite dissimilar. The first half moves very slowly, with plenty of brooding and little action. But Part Two explodes to live, with some of the most successful sequences in the history of the genre.

The greatest single asset is the cast. James Mason is great as "Dr. Polidori" (a weird in-joke, in that Dr. John Polidori was one of Byron's lovers and the author of "The Vampyre", produced in Switzerland the same summer that Ms. Shelley wrote her greatest novel), a definitely offbeat reprise of the role assayed by Ernest Thesiger in "Bride of Frankenstein". Polidori is the catalyst who inspires Frankenstein to give the creation-business one more try, but he is no mincing Dr. Praetorious, creating miniature beings in bell jars. He's more like a super-villian, with his artificial hands and Oriental servants. ("With a scalpel inyour hand," he marvels, as Victor begins work on a female creature, "you're a different person. And to think this morning you were cutting a wedding cake.")

Michael Sarrazin is cast as the monster, created handsome, flawless, and beloved by his creator (a rather bland Leonard Whiting). But there was something wrong with the process, and as his physical structure degenerates, Sarrazin takes on the aspect of a monster. No longer beautiful, the creature is now rejected by Frankenstein, who destroys all the mirrors in the laboratory and withholds the truth from his creation, leading to the inevitable tragic denouement.

The special effects are a real treat, with the climax in the arctic wastes (for the first time in any version of "Frankenstein") reaching truly epic proportions.

FREAKS In 1932, Tod Browing was on top of the world. Hailed as the greatest horror director of the twenties, he had already made his mark in sound with the tremendously successful screen adaptation of the Lugosi stage hit, "Dracula". Now he was approached by MGM, who offered to bankroll his latest project, a macabre love story set in the grimy, backwash world of a carnival side show. For this most unusual film, Browning imported sideshow attractions from all corners of the earth — pinheads, midgets, armless and legless beings, the maimed and the mutilated who constituted the freak shows of the world. From this bevy of the blighted, he fashioned a story unique in its simplicity and its power —

power to move, and most certainly, power to horrify. For horrify it did, inspiring a frenzy of outrage and indignation sufficient to have had the film yanked from distribution almost immediately. And in the 46 years that have intervened, its subsequent showings have been few.

In those early days of sound, film-makers, especially those working within the horror genre, feared the wrath of an aroused public. In "Frankenstein", when Colin Clive realizes that his creation lives, he shrieks delightedly those immortal words: "It's alive!" Those words were followed by others, cut from the original release: "How like a god!" Much of the original "King Kong" was censored, and the black mass sequence in "The Black Cat" must have caused many a flack to wring his hands in apprehension at the response of the "good citizens". "Freaks" truly touched a nerve, and the knee-jerk it elicited has caused this masterpiece to be supressed to this day.

The film tells the story of the midget Hans, who becomes smitten with a beautiful but normal-sized trapeze artist called Cleopatra. His attentions are the source of a private joke she shares with her lover, the strongman Hercules — until they learn that Hans has inherited a good deal of money. They then plot for her to first marry, then slowly poison her diminutive bridegroom.

The wedding feast remains one of the most forceful sequences ever recorded, as the freaks, seated at an enormous banquet table set up inside the tent, begin a wild bacchanal, dancing and screaming, and toasting the bride as one of their own. "One of us, one of us," they chant, as a midget bearing a goblet of champagne almost as large as himself offers a drink to each of the wedding party, and then to the bride herself. Cleopatra is repulsed. "Freaks!" she howls at them, hurling aside the wine, fleeing the arena.

Time passes, and Hans grows steadily weaker. His wife attributes it to food poisoning but even Hans knows better than that. By now, Cleopatra and Hercules are followed everywhere, their comings and goings signalled by the sounds of scurrying, crawling freaks. And the camera has moved lower, presenting its tale from Hans' viewpoint, making the "normal" characters appear outsized. Finally, as the ailing dwarf speaks privately with a fellow midget, he gives the word: "Tonight!"

Now "Freaks" becomes a tale of terrible retribution. Earlier we were told by a carny barker that the freaks live by a code: "Offend one, and you offend them all." As the sky is slashed by lightning and a driving rain sweeps relentlessly across the compound, we see the wagons begin to move as the circus pulls up stakes to move to another town. Cleo, meanwhile, is about to give Hans his medicine, but now he refuses, demanding to see the bottle from which it was poured. She is dumbfounded. Several of Hans' friends then begin to close in on her and she screams, just as their wagon strikes a tree.

Hercules then appears, hoping to rescue Cleo, and the strongman easily defeats Hans and his tiny cohorts. Even the clown, Bozo (Wallace Ford, in what amounted to a romantic lead, as a sub-plot involved him with a normal female circus performer), is unable to defend Hans against Hercules' enraged attack. But as the strongman looks around, he realizes that Cleo has fled out into the storm. As he steps out into the dark of the storm, he sees a sight as shocking as anything ever projected onto the motion picture screen — the freaks, the deformed grotesques of every stripe, are moving, crawling, dragging through the mud, reaching out for him! Attempting to flee, he slips in the mud, and like a man in a nightmare, running and running but never moving, the strange and twisted beings, brandishing knives in their teeth or between flipper-like appendages, finally reach him.

We cut abruptly to Cleopatra, running in stark animal terror through the shadowed

woods. Behind her, moving slowly but surely, they continue to dog her, pursuing their prey with a joyous abandon. We see them clearly for only an instant, when a gash of lightning briefly illuminates the thick forest. We hear Cleopatra scream once, as the thunder continues to hammer away at the night. Cut to darkness.

The film had begun with a carnival barker making his spiel — in effect, the film is a story he tells to the crowd — and now we return to him, standing over an open pit, gesturing at something within it. "How she got that way," he tells them, "will never be known. Some say a jealous lover. Others...the code of the freaks..."

It is Cleopatra in the pit, or what remains of her. As Chris Steinbrunner described it: "...what was once Cleopatra (was) now a crouched figure on a bed of straw, a figure that looks incredibly like a huge woman-chicken: tufted, flappered, lame, scarred, half-blind, mindless, and clucking. Bent over, she is now only as tall as Hans, and far more macabre an oddity than he: she is completely subhuman."

The film marked the finish of Browning's career. Though he went on to direct a few more films, even the notable "The Devil Doll" with Lionel Barrymore was a pale reflection of his earlier work. Broken by the public's refusal to accept his greatest work, he retired in 1939, to his castle-like home in California, where he died at the age of 80.

INTRO TO THE TEN WORST As the vampire descends the castle steps, he imparts instructions to his hunchbacked servant. The make-up is unspeakable, the set even worse. The would-be vampire lord is wearing a pimp-like mustache and a cheap cape that wouldn't get him into Studio 54 on the slowest night of the year. The English dubbing doesn't even come close, and the plastic bats are suspended by black thread that stands out like an albino basketball player.

"Is that all, sir?" the hunchback finally asks.

The vampire fires him a cold stare, then scowls. "Don't call me 'sir'," he corrects. "Call me 'master'!"

Strictly speaking, these aren't the worst horror films of all time, but rather the best of the worst. The really bad ones, the boring ones, you don't even watch through. No, these are the epics that you wouldn't miss for anything, the kind you tell your friends about, the schlock classics that never lose their appearl.

Like the Ten Best, these are in no particular order. So:

ROBOT VS THE AZTEC MUMMY Mexican horror films may not be very good — four have wound up on this Ten Worst list — but they sure as hell are durable. No matter how extreme the editing, it never mars the enjoyment. For example, in the version of this opus most commonly shown on TV, the titular clash of titans never does happen, one of many segments excised on an apparently arbitrary basis, to make the film run 60 minutes. And it still made the list!

We're dealing here with an Aztec Mummy (naturally), who stands guard over the Precious Jewels, and an insidious mustache-twister known as The Bat ("for years I tortured small animals, with great pleasure, to learn the secret of life!"), who schemes to relieve the tomb of its treasure. To this end, he creates a Robot (a stove inhabited by a migrant worker) to sic on the human bandage. The Bat is also opposed by a Beautiful Girl, and her Reporter Boyfriend, whose hatred for the villian is so intense that even while he is bound and at his foe's mercy, he hisses, "Bat, you are mad! And ignorant, also!"

Like a weird remake of a late 30's Universal programmer, its ludicrous execution makes it much more entertaining, and the severe editing only serves to enrich the folly of the entire enterprise.

DRACULA'S DOG You may not have known it, but the Count had a dog, every bit as nasty as himself. And in this Hall of Famer, he comes to the United States to find his master's descendant. Count Fido doesn't wear a cape, but he has a lackey, who drives him around and stands guard over his doggy coffin — for you see, he is also a vampire! And, brother, you ain't seen nothin' till you see Voltan (that's his name) mesmerize some poor puppy, then bite its neck and suck away. The puppies, in turn, also become vampires, following Voltan down the road to ruin.

Somehow, Jose Ferrer got involved in this project, playing a cross between Van Helsing and a Dog Catcher. Unfortunately, though, whenever the star is off-camera, the action grinds down and the audience starts snoring — a traditional problem with Dracula adaptations.

THE MAN AND THE MONSTER A concert pianist is periodically transformed into a werewolf while playing a certain Tchaikowski sonata. It's all the result of an ancient gypsy curse — but who cares?! This Mexican entry is an absolute hoot from beginning to end, with production values way above average for South of the Border cinema. One scene in particular, wherein the tormented musician (Enrique Rambal) undergoes the metamorphosis from man to wolf in the middle of a performance and runs amok on the concert hall set, scattering extras like chickens and doing a job on his piano worthy of Jerry Lee Lewis in his prime, is worth the price of admission — so long as you aren't paying anything.

METEOR MONSTER There is a level at which awful movies approach high art, and if not for its plodding pace, this combination SF-horror-western-soapera might make it," wrote Joe Dante in Castle of Frankenstein, regarding "Meteor Monster".

Every once in a while, there comes a film that is not only bad, but bad in a totally original way. Just as "The Thing" was uniquely excellent, this film explored new depths of unpleasantness, laying repellant image upon repellant image, and stitching it into a latticework of unrelieved bathos — a once-in-a-lifetime cinematic bummer, preserved forever, like some grotesque insect, in celluloid amber. This film is so offensive, it has been known to elicit physical reactions similar to those experienced by certain, sensitive types in reptire houses. The only sane response is laughter.

A young boy is playing outside his home, when the sky begins to suddenly glow and sizzle. The kid looks up. It's a meteor, and it strikes him head on! Yet, somehow, he survives, though he has been transformed into a truly pitiful monstrosity, matted hair covering his body and an IQ reduced to sub-human level. His mother, hopelessly confused and embarrassed by the thing her son has become, hides him away, and the film, which has been through three different genres already, shifts gears again into relentlessly grim soap opera.

To quote once again from the perceptive Mr. Dante: "If your filmic sense of humor is warped enough, you may find this entertaining, in a mind-rotting way, provided you turn it off before it becomes depressing." This opus was first released in 1957 as "Teenage Monster."

THE BLOODY PIT OF HORROR Mickey Hagarty owns this castle, see, and it'd make the perfect location for a low budget monster epic being planning by this group of Hollywood sharpies. They con him into letting them use it — but who's conning whom? The director starts losing his starlets, and the leading man is losing his mind. You see, Mickey is actually his own ancestor, and periodically dons a red hood and gauntlets to become — the Crimson Executioner! His specialty is torturing beautiful women, in some of the most offbeat ways imaginable. By the end of this masterpiece, there are seven women down in the dungeons, being barbequed, quick-frozen, sliced and diced.

Supposedly "based on the writings of the Marquis de Sade, founder of sadism!" it seems equally influenced by the work of Rube Goldberg. None of your boring old racks and Iron Maidens here, as the actresses revolve, dangle and swing from the most baroque equipment I've ever seen. If you're not too squeamish on the subject, this one's a certified riot!

THE BRANIAC Abel Salazar (the Mexican Chris Lee) is an alien who first came to earth some five hundred years ago, and became a prominent wizard. Unfortunately, he made some enemies, it seems, because a court sentences him to be tortured to death, for the crime of "dogmatism". (I didn't know it was illegal, either.)

He dies laughing, however, placing a terrible curse on the heads of his accusers; then arrives in modern day Mexico in a cardboard space ship, to personally fulfill it. He polishes off his enemy's descendants (each of whom is played by the same actor) in a most imaginative manner — he eats their brains! Shrugging off his human guise, and looking for all the world like wonder wart-hog's idiot brother, he sticks his long tubular tongue right through his victim's neck, and sucks out the last drop of grey matter.

This is truly inspired drivel, with Senor Salazar hamming it to the hilt, devouring the tenth rate scenery — in addition to every brain in the house.

THE WEREWOLF OF WOODSTOCK Tige Andrews is a hippie-hating redneck from Woodstock, N.Y., who's infuriated when a hoard of the long-hairs invade his home-town for the famour late-60's rock festival. So, once it's over, he heads for the stage and starts smashing it up, only to be struck by a dangling electric cable.

Don't ask how, but this somehow causes him to become a werewolf, and for the remainder of this made-for-TV misfire, he wanders around attacking stray musicians.

At one point, it's decided that noise might kill him, so a rock band gets up on stage, turn loose their amps, and blow his doors off. But somehow he escapes, in a dune buggy, no less! — and heads for a local power station, where he's finally iced.

A Dick Clark Production, I'll give it a six. It's got a good beat, and you can laugh to it!

FRANKENSTEIN VS THE SPACE MONSTER The year this turkey was released (1966) it was the U.S. entry at the Trieste SF Film Festival. We've come a long way, baby!

An experimental rocket ship, piloted by an android named Frank, runs into problems and crashes back to Earth, just a hop, skip and a jump from where a couple of aliens are collecting our women to help repopulate their world. The android is badly damaged in the crash (hence, taking incredible liberties, he becomes the "Frankenstein" of the film's title) and spends the next hour wandering around the countryside, scaring the bejeezus out of people.

But forget the android; it's the aliens that make this one worth watching again and again. Commanded by a Vampira-like femme, and her bald-headed, pointy-eared minister, they are a laugh a minute (sometimes more) delivering such deathless dialogue as: "We must continue with Phase Two of our plan, to capture the Earth women for use as breeding stock!"

In case you were wondering, there is a Space Monster, but he's kept in a cage for most of the flick. Special effects are ludicrous, production values nil, and except for the Space Monster, there isn't an actor in the house. True zero-level film making of the so-bad-it's-good variety!

SAMSON VS THE PANTHER WOMAN No, not the biblical strongman, but rather a Mexican wrestler-cum-superhero, a la Mil Mascaras, complete with costume and Liberace cape. The Samson series is not quite up to the Mascaras epics, but those are rarely shown on U.S. television. And, combining as they do, two such perfectly renegade elements as wrestling and monsters, the Samson flicks deserve some recognition — even if it isn't altogether positive.

There are generally at least two long wrestling scenes in each film, and they are, without exception, energetically choreographed and extremely exciting. And, since this is a movie, the grapplers can make contact, wrestle like madmen, then rest indefinitely after they've cut, eliminating the long stretches of "mat time" needed during extended matches in the real world.

I recall one contest between Samson and an especially aggressive masked opponent. Each held a fall, and were wailing away, when Samson unmasks his foe only to discover he's been battling a werewolf! The lycanthrope then, inexplicably, turns into a bat and wings his way out of the arena.

This series entry concerns the mad proprietor of a waxworks (he is, of course, disfigured and hence Loathes Beauty) who conducts Dr. Moreau-like experiments on the side. At one point, Samson gets a phonecall, warning him that the female lead is about to be transformed into a Panther Woman.

"I'll get on it in a minute," he intones, "but first I have a rassling match!"

PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE The absolute nadir of the motion picture art. It begins and ends with an inane voice-over by Hollywood Psychic, Criswell, asking the question: "Can you prove this didn't happen!?"

Apparently filmed in someone's back yard, with the likes of Tor Johnson, Vampira and the already-dead Bela Lugosi, this epic concerns itself with the residents of a small, California town, who are, in the words of Joe Dante, "terrified by UFO's in the shape of thermos plugs which revive the dead."

Written, produced and directed by one man, Edward D. Wood, Jr., this is cosmic kitsch of the highest order — an absolute must-see!

— Bill Kunkel

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Arnie: Well, we don't have special "ghost glasses" to hand out to the first 150 readers of the "monstermania" issue of Four Star Extra, but I think Joyce has come up with a premium that's very nearly as useless.

To celebrate our devotion to the world of monsters -- and in homage to those theaters which used to hand out little trinkets so long ago -- we are providing each and every reader with a genuine stick-on skull patch. Amaze your friends!

And, no, that's the patch itself to the upper right, not a tipped-in photo of one of your four favorite luminaries.

Joyce: The only horror film I was ever allowed to see as a child was "Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein". Fortunately, that restriction was moderated by the time "Horrors of the Wax Museum" and "Murders in the Rue Morgue" came along with those wonderful 3-D glasses. "Murders in the Rue Morgue" was something of a disappointment to me, since the murderer was an ape. And how could even a three-dimensional monkey impress anyone after they'd seen "King Kong"?

Actually, the nation's love affair with monsters has reached such proportions that this year that there seemed to be definite signs this year that Halloween is turning into a major holiday. And not only because of the costumes and candy to be sold; there's a definite tendency for people to plan parties, schedule special events and anticipate the day with a keenness akin to what one might feel for Thanksgiving or Christmas.

There are even, for godsake, people doing outdoor decorations -- ghosts that fly out of chimneys, draculas who sit up in opened coffins, witches who fly around the house on broomsticks.

I feel that society's interest has reached the point at which Halloween should be turned into a legal holiday on which people would stay home from work, dress up in costumes and go out into the streets to party and make merry. It could be a fall festival devoted to the love of the macabre and mischievous.

Don't just sit there; write your senator!

Arnie: Couched in frivolous terms though it is, Joyce's suggestion has much merit. I'd like to see Halloween become a sort of national Mardi Gras with a day off on November 1 so that we all have time to recover from being hedonistic-to-the-hilt.

But amidst this veritable call to arms issued by my wife, I fear I must sound a sadder note. With mounting chagrin, I've watched the Halloween of my youth wither and die at the hands of the scrooges. Every special day has its sourpusses, you know; Christmas grumps have just had a better press agent. If three guys are celebrating something on the far side of the moon, you can bet that some little alien grump will pop out of a crater to spoil it for them.

We've pretty well beaten the Christmas scrooges, actually. Oh, lots of people are

still xmas grumps, but apart from their immediate families, who cares? Chirstmas curmudgeons haven't spoiled my holidays much, and I doubt they've done a lot to dent your joy, either.

But Halloween is different. The whole concept of "Trick or Treat" revolves around people -- usually strangers -- giving food to children. Mull that one over for a minute. "Don't take candy from strangers," your dear mother warned you ten thousand times. Yes, even your own saintly mother sold out to the Halloween grumps. And if that noble woman could falter, could succumb, small wonder that trick or treating is dying out in many urban centers. We got just 12 kids at the door this year.

What keeps the little monsters from roaming the streets as is right and proper? It's parental fear of those Halloween scrooges with the razorblade apples and ground glass cookies. How sad that, even as the other aspects of the holiday are growing, we're letting the sick-os win on the trick or treat front.

On the other hand, whatever we don't give away I get to eat. It is a Milky Way-sated star who writes to you this month.

Bill: But since most of you are too old to trick or treat anyway, you might want to tool over to Long Branch, N.J.. There, on an amusement pier straight out of an arcade fanatic's fantasy, sits the greatest "spook house" of them all -- the "Haunted Mansion".

The multi-leveled Mansion is not a ride, but a walk-through fantasia populated by waxlike exhibits, enormous monster constructs and live actors.

Parties enter at intervals escorted by a lanky black vampire, and as you enter, you hear screams from the parties ahead. Jack the Ripper decapitates a live, pleading victim; a werewolf breaks loose from up above and bolts past you snarling and frothing (signs warning against so much as touching the actors are everywhere); an impassive lab technician tells the sad story of the specimen beside him -- a human body with the head of a giant light bulb!

The effects are startling, actually frightening. You pass a series of wax exhibits, when one of the figures animates and lunges toward you. The live characters seem to be young, starving actors, and they play their parts, whether classic or contemporary, with true gusto.

And the centerpiece of the Mansion, down in its bowels, is an enormous, obscene creature out of some Lovecraftian nightmare, glowing and steaming like a naked lobster.

It's a great idea and a great show. I suspect similar operations will soon appear all over the country. And if the quality is as high elsewhere as it is in Long Branch, you mavens of the macabre won't be disappointed.

Arnie: Everyone is putting away their fangs for another year right now, and I think Joyce is already working on her Channukah "want list" so it's time to pack it in until next month. Keep watching the shadows.

NEXT: THE HOLIDAYS