



**SAD-EYED:** He is no menace at a lunch table

# Farewell To Monsters

BY LOUIS BERG

**Karloff is through with supernatural bogeymen. He's got a new idea for pricking your scalp . . .**

**B**ORIS KARLOFF, the screen bogeyman, is through for good with Frankenstein monsters, foot-loose mummies, zombies, Draculas, ghouls, werewolves and other forms of diabolism.

By the same token he is finished with Universal Pictures. In the future he will scare the customers for RKO and in his natural guise.

His natural guise is not terrifying.

Mr. Karloff in person and at a lunch table is gray-haired, sad-eyed, good-humored and British public school. His swarthy, parchment-like skin explains some of his roles — otherwise he might be the village schoolmaster, a librarian or a parish priest.

Mr. Karloff has his own theory, however, as to what should curdle the blood and prickle the scalp. The supernatural, he holds, is less frightening than life itself.

"If you take a walk through a graveyard in the dead of night, and the wind howls, a mist rises and the clock strikes twelve, it inevitably follows that a white form will rise from a grave and tap you on the shoulder. What did you expect to confront you in such a place



**HARMLESS:** At home he is his amiable self, enjoys music

and at such a time — Mary and her little lamb?

"But if you are dining at home and are promised a dish of cabbage and you lift the cover from the pot and see there the head of your best friend, to the element of terror is added the element of shock. You did not expect it — that is, unless you put the head there yourself."

To illustrate this macabre example, Mr. Karloff, his eyes glittering fiendishly, lifted the top of a casserole dish. The dish contained — shrimps.

The point settled, Mr. Karloff was his amiable self. He was not mad, he insisted, at Universal Pictures or at anybody. He parted with the company on the best of terms and may even make individual pictures under its banner. Meanwhile he is under contract to RKO for three pictures a year — non-supernatural chillers — at an honorarium reported to be in the neighborhood of \$100,000.

This is quite an improvement over his early days in Hollywood when he worked for 11 years as an extra and truck-driver before Frankenstein lifted him to fame and the top-money brackets.

But there came a day when he got tired of clumping around in gruesome clay feet. When Frankenstein had a son and the series threatened to go on indefinitely, Karloff began to be worried. Finally there was a picture which Karloff refers to as the "monster clambake," with everything thrown in — Frankenstein, Dracula, a hunchback and a "man-beast" that howled in the night. It was too much.

Karloff thought it was ridiculous and said so. His contract was about to expire. To answer him, the man at the studio wearily hauled out the books and showed him what the "clambake" had grossed. The figure was high.

#### Saved by a Writer

"Don't ask me to feel sorry for you," the man said. "You feel sorry for me. You can quit after your next picture. I have to keep on making them."

Karloff admitted the logic. "But you'll have to get another monster," he said firmly.

His current picture under the new dispensation is a major product called "Bedlam," based on the history of the famous British institution for mental

cases. Understandably, it has its gruesome aspects, but the action and Mr. Karloff's part in it have one foot firmly planted in plausibility. Val Lewton, the script-writer for "Isle of the Dead," produced it. Mr. Karloff has great love and respect for Mr. Lewton as the man who rescued him from the living dead and restored, so to speak, his soul.

#### Scoreless Tie

MR. KARLOFF leads a quiet life between pictures — spends most of his leisure compiling anthologies or playing the piano. He is one of the few intellectuals who speak well of Hollywood. Though even as he praised that center of culture, he was reminded of a polo game between producers and writers. Even with the redoubtable Mr. Zanuck on the side of the producers, the game ended in a scoreless tie. "The producers couldn't; the writers wouldn't," remarked a Hollywood wit.

Mr. Karloff had something like that

happen to him. Someone next door to him gave a party to a noted Hollywood personage. It was a thorough prewar affair, with klieg lights, mobs of people, and revelry far into the night.

Mr. Karloff, who had to get up at dawn to get into his Frankenstein make-up — a three-hour job — tossed and groaned, finally decided to call the police. But with one hand on the receiver, he reconsidered.

"What do you want," he asked himself, "a Hollywood contract or a night's sleep?" His portrayal of the monster the next morning was the most frightening of his career.

Mr. Karloff's career as a bogeyman has been a long one. At the age of nine he played a monster in a Cinderella play given for the benefit of the parish church.

As a young man in "stock" he once performed at a lunatic asylum in Canada. The theory was that a theatrical performance would have therapeutic value.

But the inmates were not impressed. They shrieked in the wrong places, and one amateur critic sat with his back turned to the stage and applauded loudly throughout — also at the wrong intervals. Mr. Karloff, who has made a career of frightening people, was scared to death.

The End



"BEDLAM," his new movie, is gruesome but plausible