

Even a man who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night,

May become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms and the autumn Moon is bright.

--from *The Wolf Man*

Monsters by Moonlight: The Astrology of Universal Studios and the Classic Horror Film

Part I

On May 7, 2004, Universal Studios released a movie called *Van Helsing*, with Hugh Jackman in the title role as the famous vampire hunter. It was the week of a Lunar Eclipse at 14 Scorpio 42. The myth of a monstrous Scorpion's relentless pursuit of Orion the hunter forms the dramatic backdrop for the sign so often associated with death and reincarnation. As such, with the Eclipse Moon in Scorpio, *Van Helsing* was something of an homage to Universal's classic monster movies of the 1930s and '40s. To capitalize on perhaps a rebirth of interest in the genre, that same year, Universal reissued and repackaged several DVD box sets devoted to their most famous monsters: Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolf Man, the Mummy, the Invisible Man, and the Creature from the Black Lagoon. A number of fine documentaries were produced as special features to accompany these sets. The title of this article is taken from the documentary *Monster By Moonlight* that is included in *The Wolf Man* box set, devoted to the 1941 original, with Lon Chaney, Jr. in his greatest role as Lawrence Talbot, the tortured victim of the werewolf's curse.

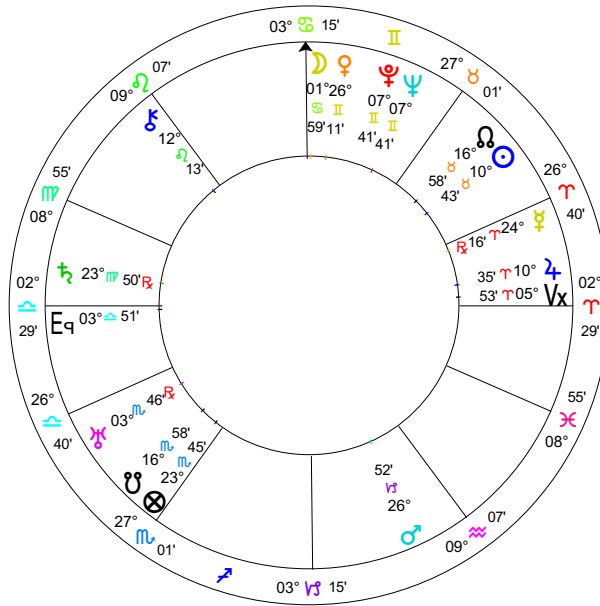
Beginning in 1957, millions of children of my generation first learned about the Moon's power to evoke any number of undead, otherworldly, or shape-shifting creatures through the release of 52 classic horror flicks to local TV stations around the country. The promotion was called *Shock Theater!* Typically, on Friday or Saturday nights throughout the 1960s, we were spooked and delighted by some campy local TV ghoul who introduced and poked fun at numerous titles from Universal's horror library. My mother warned me that if I watched such things I'd have nightmares. And she was right. Still, in 1964, when Lon Chaney, Jr., came to Shreveport, Louisiana, for a public appearance, my mother took me to see the great star in person. That day, he signed photographs—a terrifying close-up headshot of himself in his heyday sporting the famous Wolf Man makeup created for him by Universal's makeup artist extraordinaire Jack Pierce.

The actor who, perhaps more than any other, became identified with the cinematic dangers of a Full Moon, had been born Creighton Tull Chaney on February 10, 1906—the day following a Total Lunar Eclipse at 19 Leo 40. Eclipses are often connected to royal births, and indeed, Creighton Chaney was born into what would eventually become Hollywood royalty: the son of Lon Chaney, the silent screen's "Man of a Thousand Faces." Creighton originally acted under his birth name. But following the death of his famous father, in an effort to capitalize on the family connection, the studio wanted to bill him as "Lon Chaney, Jr." Initially Creighton resisted, but eventually he caved to the pressure and was known for the rest of his career as either "Lon Chaney, Jr.," or simply "Lon Chaney." He was 58 when I saw him in Shreveport in 1964. He would live nine more years. In looking back now at the pictures that were taken of him that Sunday afternoon, what I didn't see then was the face of a famous actor, prematurely aged, perhaps by alcohol. What I did experience that day, however, was something magical and transcendent in its own way. Over half a century later, I now know what it was: Surely I was in the presence of the god Neptune, who, of course, rules the movies and the movie industry, casting his special spell over the hundreds of children and their parents in attendance—with the Wolf Man himself, Lon Chaney, Jr., as his good will ambassador.

For me, now as then, Mr. Chaney stands as a major league player in a bygone era of moviemaking that took place at Universal Studios largely between 1931 and 1945. Perhaps Universal's budgets and stable of stars weren't quite up there with Hollywood's more glamour-oriented studios. But while MGM, Paramount and others threw their hats into the horror ring, too, Universal led the way and is best remembered as the home of the classic monster movie. Their formula for success in this realm, it's true, they recycled rather shamelessly through numerous sequels. But Universal horror had real style. Heavily influenced by German Expressionism, Universal horror emphasized lighting, camera angles and atmosphere, accompanied by evocative musical scores. They also entertained and scared the hell out of us without resorting to the overt gore of today's horror genre. However, the classic Universal horror films of the 1930s and '40s were also a popular mid-twentieth century bridge to timeless characters and situations from Gothic fiction, folklore and legend. Not surprisingly, the astrological and mythological roots of this phenomenon run deep. Among other things, as we shall see, all of the Water signs—with their relation to the subconscious, their mythic archetypes, as well as their planetary rulers—will play important roles.

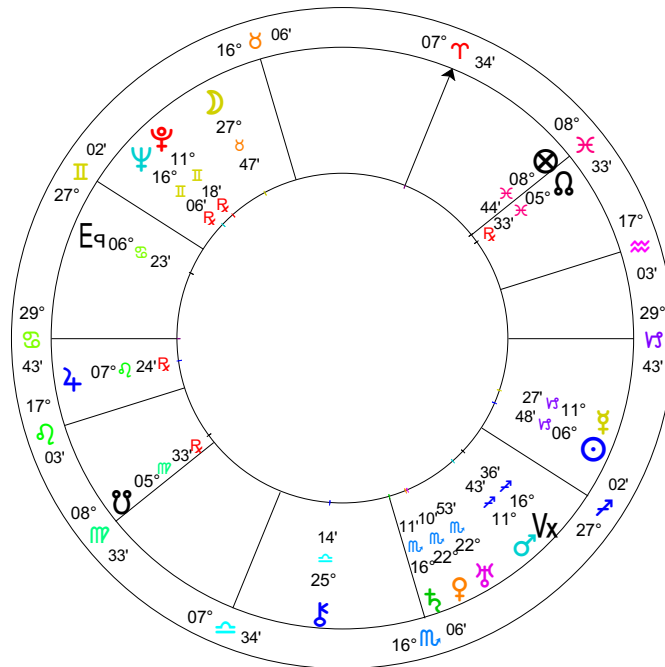
To begin with, in its broadest sense, the film industry itself was just one expression of the planetary cycle that commenced with the great conjunction of Neptune (modern-day ruler of Pisces) and Pluto (modern-day ruler of Scorpio) on April 30, 1892, at 7 Gemini 41. [See below: Neptune-Pluto conjunction] The deep transformative power of Pluto combined with Neptune's glamour, mysticism, and illusion—in the sign of communication—planted the seeds for a profound international language, through the medium of motion pictures, never before seen. Note also that the degree of this Neptune-Pluto conjunction, roughly 7½ degrees mutable, is a World Axis point, thus lending even more punch to the expression of this particular cycle. Moreover, given the enormous length of the Neptune-Pluto cycle—they will not conjoin again until September 2, 2384, and in Gemini—we are only now beginning to glean the significance of the current cycle and the far-reaching power of movies.

Neptune-Pluto, Greenwich, England
 Natal Chart
 Apr 30 1892 NS
 3:38 pm UT +0:00
 Greenwich
 51°N29'00"W00'
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node



With Gemini’s involvement, it would be two brothers who brought about the symbolic birth of the film industry, when on the night of December 28, 1895, ten short films by Louis and Auguste Lumière were presented to a paying public in Paris, France. Neither brother was present. Their father, Antoine, worked the projection machine, the Cinématographe, for 33 spectators who paid one franc each. Moving pictures had been displayed before, but this was the first time the public paid for the privilege, and the gods were present: The event took place at six in the evening, at the Salon Indien in the basement, i.e., Pluto’s realm (the underworld), of the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines. But Neptune, ruler of the oceans, got the final word with the last of the ten films, entitled *La Mer (The Sea)*. [See below: Lumière Films – Paris]

Lumiere Films - Paris
 Natal Chart
 Dec 28 1895 NS
 6:00 pm -0:09:20
 Paris, France
 48°N52' 002°E21'
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node
 MOMA Dept. of Film and Video

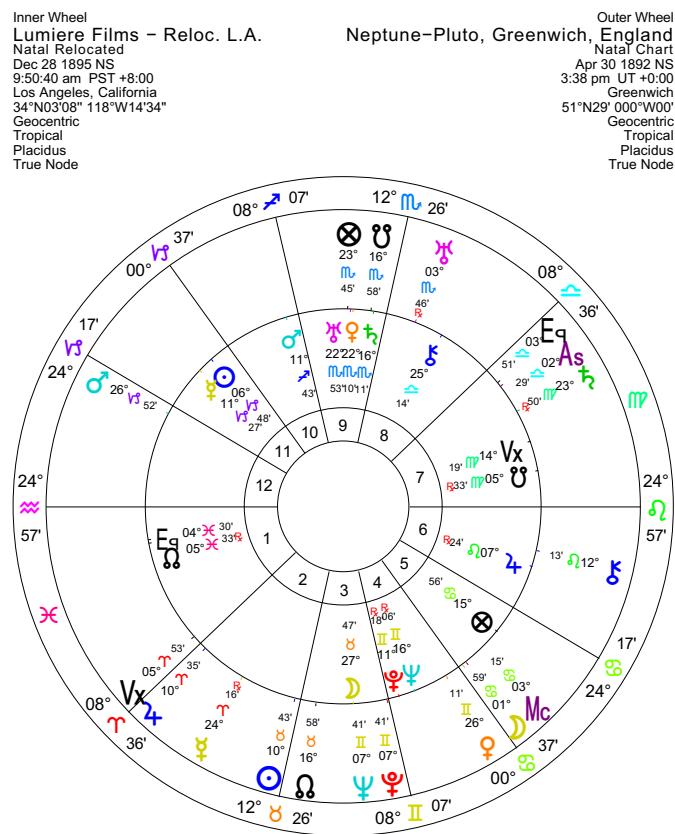


A few years later and across the Atlantic, one might say that the first American movie “monster,” financially speaking at least, was Thomas Alva Edison, who then owned most of the patents related to motion picture equipment in the United States. Edison’s impact on early film technology and the early industry puts him in a class by himself. But of course, he was born to it: On February 11, 1847, with Neptune conjunct his Sun in Aquarius—a visionary in the realms of technology and photography. Aided by his Saturn in Pisces, Edison would materialize illusion through the medium of film.

But Edison was much more than just an inspired innovator. With Mars in Capricorn, he was also a tough and single-minded businessman. In large part, through Edison’s influence, The Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC)—founded in 1909 and also known as the Edison Trust—held a tight rein on the early motion picture industry in this country and fiercely pursued litigation against its domestic competitors. Edison’s operations were based in New Jersey, however. As such, many independent filmmakers sought to escape the vengeful eye of

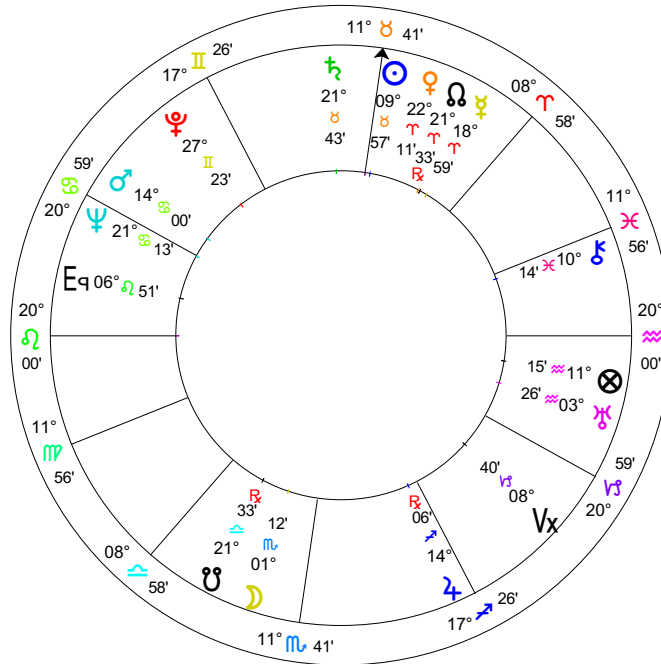
the MPPC by relocating across the continent to Southern California. When one relocates the 1895 Lumière Films–Paris “birth of the film industry” chart to Los Angeles, 8 Gemini moves to the IC of the relocation chart. Thus the 1892 Neptune-Pluto conjunction at 7 Gemini, the seed energy of the movie industry, if you will, moves to the IC of the relocation chart also, suggesting that the gods governing this enterprise have at last found their “home.” [See below: bi-wheel, Lumière Films Los Angeles relocation and Neptune-Pluto conjunction]

Among the more persistent nuisances to the MPPC was a German emigrant named Carl Laemmle, born January 17, 1867. Laemmle initially produced movies through Independent Moving Pictures (IMP). However, in New York, on April 30, 1912, the 20th anniversary of the Neptune-Pluto conjunction, Laemmle and a number of other producers merged forces—incorporating as the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. Laemmle assumed the role of president in July 1912. But in a few years, he bought out the other stockholders. Under Laemmle’s guidance, Universal became a model for the modern film studio, fully integrating under one entity the industry’s three pivotal branches—film production, distribution and exhibition. Astrologically speaking, we might think of them as the three prongs of Neptune’s trident.



The chart for the founding of Universal is cast for a mean 12 noon position—the traditional method for erecting a chart for a corporate entity without a known time of “birth.” [See page 5: Universal Founded (New York)] With the Sun and Saturn in Earthy Taurus, Universal was initially a rather pragmatic, profit-oriented business. Guided by the business savvy of equally Earthy Capricorn Carl Laemmle, Sr., Universal’s output was primarily directed at rural audiences and featured lower-budget, potboiler-type entertainment. In perhaps a portent of the horror features to come, the original Universal chart featured a Scorpio Moon, and in fact, on

Universal Film Manufacturing Co. Founded
 Natal Chart
 Apr 30 1912
 12:00 pm EST +5:00
 New York, NY
 40°N42'51" 074°W00'23"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node
 Wikipedia

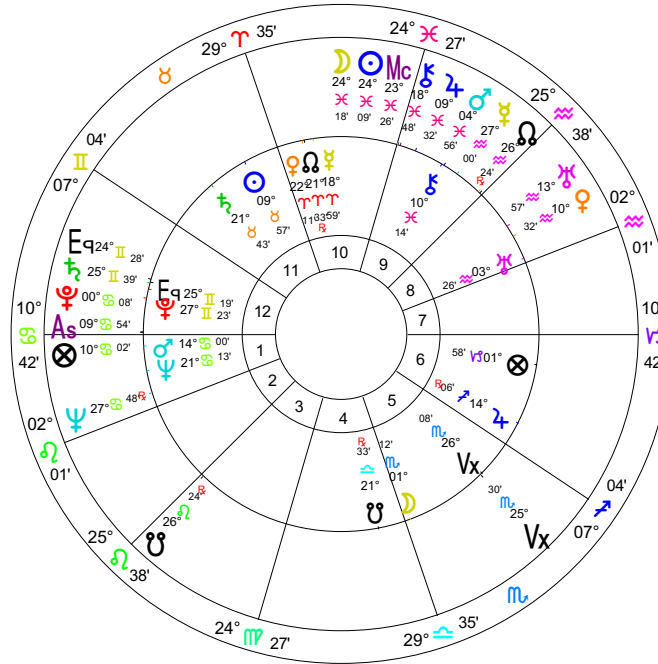


the following day, May 1, 1912, the Moon would be Full at 10 Scorpio 40. But the Moon also represents the family ties of an enterprise. And indeed, nepotism would become a Universal hallmark, as “Uncle Carl,” with Scorpionic tenacity, hired countless relatives to fill the ranks. Uranus in Aquarius, forming a T-square with the Sun-Moon opposition, perhaps speaks to the rebellious expression of this company that seemed so successfully to challenge the rigid edicts of the MPPC.

But within three years, early successes led to expansion, with Universal’s move to the West Coast and the opening of Universal Studios Hollywood, i.e., Universal City, on March 15, 1915. If one relocates the original Universal New York chart to Universal City in the San Fernando Valley, 10 Cancer moves to the relocation Asc and 24 Pisces to the MC. Note the strength of the transits for the opening of Universal City to the relocation chart. [See page 6: bi-wheel, Universal CA relocation and Universal City Opens] On March 15, 1915 (again, set for 12 noon), Moon and Sun were at 24 Pisces, conjunct the relocation MC. Jupiter and Mars were also in Pisces in the 9th house, trine the relocation Asc. The MC and Asc of the Universal City opening chart are nearly perfectly conjunct the relocation MC and Asc respectively. Most important of all, Pluto by transit has now moved onto the World Axis at 0 Cancer. In the original Universal New York chart, 0 Cancer is the Asc/MC midpoint. This was a profound transit for transforming the face (Asc) and the reputation/destiny (MC) of the entity that had first been born in New York. And indeed, the relocation to California forever changed Universal Studios in a variety of ways. Thereafter, the chart for the opening of Universal City became the stronger governing chart for Universal Studios.

Inner Wheel
 Universal--CA Relocation
 Natal Relocated
 Apr 30 1912
 9:00 am PST +8:00
 Universal City
 34°N08'20" 118°W21'09"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node

Outer Wheel
 Universal City Opens
 Natal Chart
 Mar 15 1915
 12:00 pm PST +8:00
 Universal City
 34°N08'20" 118°W21'09"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node



Astrologically speaking, it's natural that 1915 would be an important year in the evolution of movies: Neptune and Pluto began to move closely into the semi-sextile (30°) phase of their cycle, when that which was born on the conjunction begins to manifest. For example, elsewhere in the industry, 1915 also saw the release of D.W. Griffith's epic *The Birth of a Nation*. The semi-sextile of Neptune and Pluto would last roughly from late 1915 to mid-1918.

The chart for the opening of Universal City—with its heavy emphasis on Cancer and Pisces [see above], along with Pluto (death, reincarnation) and Saturn (fear) in the 12th house (the dark)—laid the astrological groundwork for the great horror product to come. The story of the Cancer crab originates from the second labor of Heracles (Hercules), in which he was called upon to kill the Hydra—a dragon-like creature with rejuvenating heads and venomous breath that lived in a swamp. Whilst Heracles was doing battle with the beast, an enormous crab came forth from the swamp to aid the Hydra by attacking Heracles on the foot.

The myth evokes a classic battle for survival against deadly unhuman forces. But perhaps more important astrologically, with Cancer rising in the Universal City chart, the Moon becomes the chart-ruling planet. The poetry of the Moon as chart ruler here works beautifully for an enterprise that would popularize tales of the night. Moreover, many of the nuances that we remember best from classic horror derive from some sort of lunar connection. The Moon rules reflection and mirrors. In *Dracula*, the war is on when Professor Van Helsing enrages Count Dracula by confronting him with a mirror, in which the vampire casts no reflection. In *Werewolf of London*, the antidote to the curse is the flower of the exotic mariphasa plant, which blossoms only by moonlight. In the later Wolf Man series, silver, the element ruled by the Moon,

is the only sure-fire weapon against the beast. In *The Mummy's Tomb*, a brew of tana leaves will keep the old fellow alive if administered during the “cycle of the Full Moon.” Alas, the fluctuating nature of the Moon would also set the tone for the financial problems that beset Universal in the decades after Universal City was launched.

Regarding the emphasis on Pisces in the Universal City chart and its connection to the horror genre, the Greek myth from whence the story of the Pisces fish originates concerns the monster Typhon and his assault on the Olympian gods. Depicted as the greatest monster of them all, Typhon was enormous—his head “touched the stars”—and terrifying—with innumerable serpents’ heads for hands and serpents for legs. Fire shot from his eyes and flaming rocks from his mouth. In his most famous act, Typhon charged Mount Olympus to overthrow the gods. In fear, the gods transformed themselves into various animals and fled to safety. Aphrodite (Venus) and her child Eros (Cupid) transformed themselves into two fish and swam away—hence, the Pisces connection. In the end, the gods returned to Olympus, joined forces and ultimately defeated the monster when Zeus (Jupiter) hurled Mount Aetna onto Typhon, burying him in the Earth. This tale also, in part, forms a mythological link to the planet Jupiter’s traditional rulership of Pisces and the planet Venus’s exaltation there. But it is obviously a story that deals with shape-shifting beings (here, the gods and goddesses), terror and threat to the natural order through the invasion of a creature with preternatural powers. It’s the basic stuff of classic horror, and all of Universal’s great gallery of fright—Dracula, Frankenstein, Wolf Man, Mummy, Invisible Man—would reincarnate those timeless, mythic ingredients.

Of note, Typhon was both monster and god—the youngest child of Gaia (Mother Earth) and Tartarus (the abyss of Hades as deity). His dual citizenship, if you will—god and monster—made Typhon a unique character in the mythology. But he is also an archetype of horror, and as such, will continue to speak through his heirs—never more strikingly than in *Bride of Frankenstein* when Dr. Pretorius toasts his sinister alliance with Dr. Frankenstein with the famous words: “To a new world of gods and monsters!” *Bride of Frankenstein* opened on April 22, 1935. Transiting Saturn, at roughly 7½ Pisces—on the World Axis, square the 1892 Neptune-Pluto conjunction—was conjunct natal Jupiter in the Universal City chart, i.e., the traditional planetary ruler of that chart’s Pisces MC. Through *Bride of Frankenstein*, Universal’s far-reaching (Jupiter) reputation (MC) in the horror film genre was indeed made manifest (Saturn). As I’m writing this, transiting Neptune is about to station direct at 7 Pisces 1, and 80 years after its premiere, *Bride of Frankenstein* still stands as a monumental achievement. In fact, some folks consider it to be the best horror film Universal ever made. But as we shall see, the long road stretching from Universal City’s opening in 1915 through the great horror classics of the Thirties and into the war years was a drama filled with characters and events—both on and off the screen—as phantasmagorical as only Neptune could conjure.

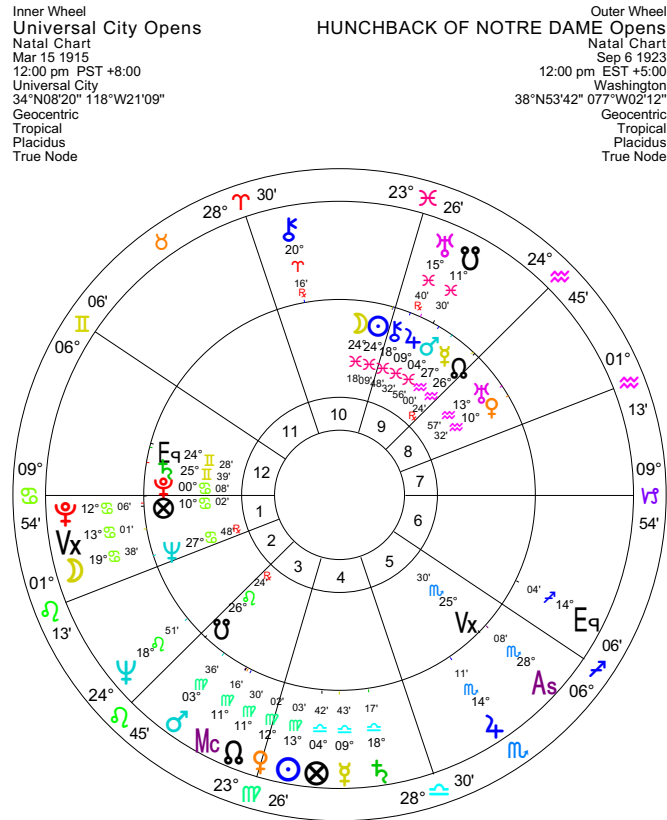
Part II

Prior to the move to the West Coast, Universal had an early success with a 1913 adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. But the next major indicator of Universal’s ultimate predominance in the horror genre would not manifest for a decade.

In the early years, Universal had made its profits on lower-budget crowd pleasers, but after the opening of Universal City, expansion and optimism encouraged the studio to invest in grander scale productions, which meant bigger budgets and often richer source material—the so-called “prestige” film. Sometimes the studio wound up losing money on these ventures, but the classier product proved effective in elevating Universal’s reputation within the industry.

Among the great triumphs in Universal’s early foray into the prestige film was *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which opened on September 6, 1923. A magnificent set depicting the façade of Notre Dame Cathedral was created. But it was the compelling performance of the silent

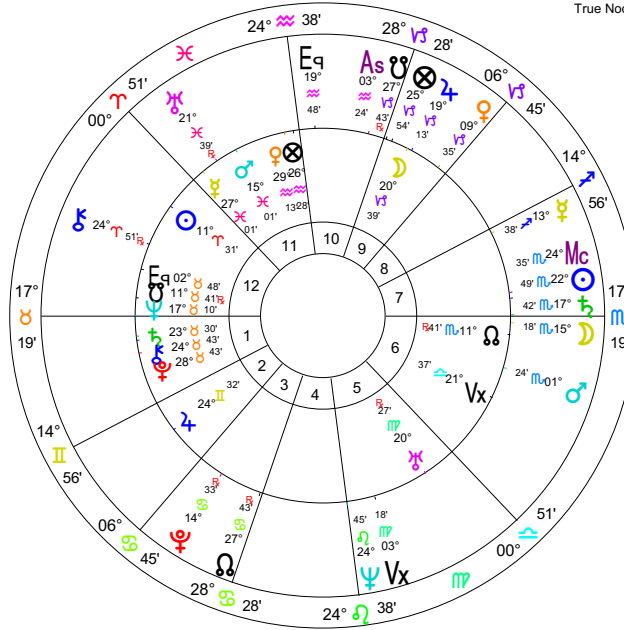
screen's "Man of a Thousand Faces," Lon Chaney, as Quasimodo, that made the film into a smash. In the transits for the opening day of *Hunchback*, the Water signs did not let us down: [See below: bi-wheel, Universal City chart and HUNCHBACK opens] Transiting Pluto in Cancer was conjunct the Universal City Asc, forming a Grand Trine with transiting Jupiter in Scorpio and transiting Uranus in Pisces.



The public demanded a follow-up to *Hunchback*. Thus, two years later, Lon Chaney ascended to legendary status with his performance as the title character in *The Phantom of the Opera*, which opened on November 15, 1925. We have a chart for Mr. Chaney, born April 1, 1883, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, at 7:24 a.m. The source of the birth time is unclear. Mr. Chaney's moniker as the "Man of a Thousand Faces" derived from his elaborate makeup creations and physical characterizations—some of which demanded painful wiring of his face or binding his arms and legs for hours at a time. The fact that Neptune is perfectly conjunct his Asc at 17 Taurus made me suspicious of the time at first. Natal Neptune—ruling illusion, fantasy and phantoms!—sitting directly on the "face" (Asc) of the man with a thousand faces would seem a little too good to be true. But I will say this: The transits and progressions to this chart, for the opening day of this actor's most famous role are astounding! Progressed Sun was conjunct natal Saturn (ruling his Capricorn MC) at 23 Taurus in the first house. Transiting Jupiter, conjunct his Moon at 19 Capricorn, ruler of his IC, suggests a famous legacy. Transiting Saturn, opposing his natal Neptune from 17 Scorpio, has just risen above the Dsc, into the 7th—definitely a moment of revelation in his career cycle of that period. Transiting Neptune, in his opening square phase, is also square natal Saturn. The transiting Lunar Nodes are conjunct the natal MC/IC axis. [See page 9: bi-wheel, Lon Chaney chart and PHANTOM Opens transits]

Inner Wheel
 Lon Chaney ("Senior")
 Natal Chart
 Apr 1 1883 NS
 7:24 am LMT +6:59:17
 Colorado Springs
 38°N53'02" 104°W49'15"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node

Outer Wheel
 Lon Chaney ("Senior")
 PHANTOM Opens Nationwide
 Transits Chart
 Nov 15 1925
 12:00 pm EST +5:00
 Washington
 38°N53'42" 077°W02'12"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node



Mr. Chaney was, of course, an Aries—the sign of the pioneer. As an aside, quite a number of the names that we still remember best from the first generation of movie stars, from the pre-dialogue era—the ones that paved the way, so to speak—were Aries as well: Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, Charles Chaplin, Wallace Beery, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, Joan Crawford, along with other big names of the day that are perhaps less well-remembered now: George Arliss, George O’Brien, Wallace Reid, Harold Lockwood, Mary Miles Minter, and Constance Talmadge.

As mentioned, nepotism was a hallmark of Uncle Carl Laemmle’s management style at Universal, and it reached its zenith in 1928, when he appointed his son, Carl Laemmle, Jr., as Universal’s head of production. “Junior” Laemmle, as he was forever known within the industry, was born April 28, 1908, and Laemmle Senior’s decision to appoint his young son to such a key role was a source of concern. Unlike the financially conservative business ethic of his father, Junior leaned more toward bigger productions with prestige status. We don’t have a published chart for Junior Laemmle, but if the date is correct, he was born with Jupiter in Leo squaring his Taurus Sun, suggesting perhaps a tendency toward excess. His Venus closely conjunct Pluto in Gemini might portend some monetary crisis. And his natal Neptune at 12 Cancer, conjunct the Universal City Asc, could imply an erosive effect on the company. But regardless of how much Junior’s influence contributed to Universal’s financial fate, he would also bring a Neptunian, visionary energy to bear on Universal’s product of the early Thirties—not the least of which were the great horror classics waiting in the wings.

In late 1929, transiting Neptune and Pluto began to move into close semi-square aspect to each other. The semi-square in a cycle represents the first test or crisis for that which was born on the conjunction. Neptune and Pluto would maintain this relationship rather closely through mid-1933. Junior Laemmle’s appointment as Universal’s head of production coincided with the onset of the Neptune-Pluto semi-square. Around the same time, sound technology began to

sweep the film industry. And indeed, talking pictures produced a semi-square-like crisis in the entire industry. Beyond the concern of whether or not the previous generation of film stars could talk sufficiently well to transition into the new medium was the enormous expense of the new sound technology, along with the task of converting theaters to handle it.

Unfortunately, the onset of the Neptune-Pluto semi-square also coincided with the Wall Street Crash of 1929, culminating on “Black Tuesday,” October 29, 1929. The semi-square would also parallel the darkest days of the Great Depression in America, which were to follow. Pluto had just stationed retrograde at 19 Cancer the week before Black Tuesday, and the Solar Eclipse at 8 Scorpio 35 would follow on November 1, 1929.

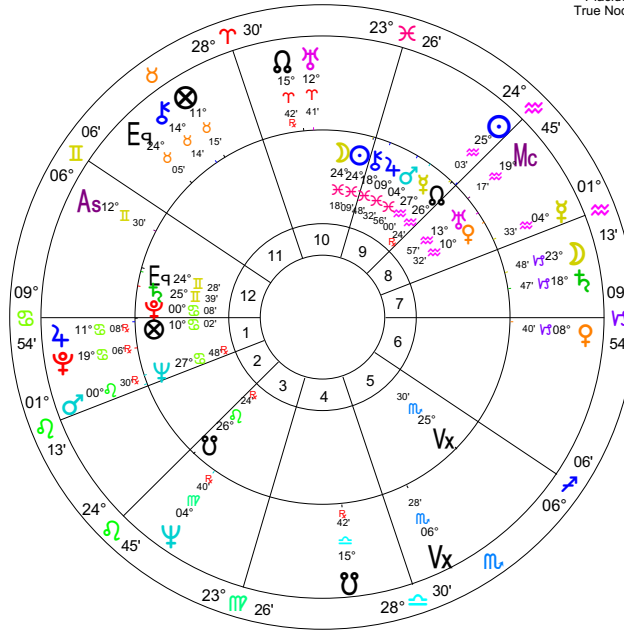
Among Junior Laemmle’s early efforts to raise the bar at Universal was the 1930 film version of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a realistic depiction of World War I from the German soldier’s point of view. It was an expensive picture to mount—over a million dollars—and this, after the Stock Market crash. What’s more, the subject matter was unlikely to raise the spirits of Depression-weary Americans. The scoffers dubbed it “Junior’s End.” As such, to great shock and dismay, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was a box office hit. What’s more, the director, Lewis Milestone, won the Academy Award for Best Director, and the film itself took home the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1930. Carl Laemmle, Sr., received the Oscar on behalf of Universal at the awards ceremony on November 5, 1930. And perhaps most important—Junior was vindicated. On the night of the Oscar win, the progressed Sun of the Universal City chart was 9 Aries 40, closely square the natal Asc. In fact, with the progressed Moon at 13 Libra, the chart was generally in the progressed Full Moon phase—a symbolic culmination of Universal’s achievement up to that point.

Not long after Universal’s Oscar win for *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Junior Laemmle moved forward with a project that had originally been planned for Lon Chaney. The director, Tod Browning, Mr. Chaney’s longtime collaborator on many of the actor’s successful silent films, was onboard, as well. But Lon Chaney died of lung cancer on August 26, 1930, before the project could take wing, so to speak. He wound up being replaced by a mostly unknown Hungarian actor. The project was, of course, 1931’s *Dracula*, and Béla Lugosi’s turn as Bram Stoker’s Transylvanian vampire would establish Mr. Lugosi as the first great horror icon of talking pictures. Moreover, *Dracula*’s financial success propelled Universal into the horror genre for which it would become famous. Astrologically speaking, *Dracula* is the first clear manifestation of Universal’s monster-film potential as foretold through the Universal City natal chart. The transits of Pluto, Neptune, Saturn and Jupiter tell the tale. [See page 11: bi-wheel, Universal City and DRACULA Opens]

For *Dracula*’s premiere on February 14, 1931, transiting Pluto and Neptune were in close semi-square aspect with each other (33’ orb). Neptune at 4 Virgo was beginning his slow opposition, spanning many years, to the Universal City Pisces planets, starting with natal Mars (traditional ruler of Scorpio) at 4 Pisces. Pluto was sesqui-square natal Mars from 19 Cancer. The film’s vampire title character combined Pluto’s death-and-resurrection theme with Neptune’s treacherous and duplicitous side. Some good luck was undoubtedly thrown into the mix with transiting Jupiter at 11 Cancer, about to station direct in conjunction to the Universal City Part of Fortune and Asc. It was indeed a moment when the natal chart’s potential to express through the horror genre was ripe. The Water signs and Neptune/Pluto metaphors were there—but it took Saturn to make it happen.

Inner Wheel
 Universal City Opens
 Natal Chart
 Mar 15 1915
 12:00 pm PST +8:00
 Universal City
 34°N08'20" 118°W21'09"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node

Outer Wheel
 Universal City Opens
 DRACULA Opens Nationwide
 Transits Chart
 Feb 14 1931
 12:00 pm EST +5:00
 Washington
 38°N53'42" 077°W02'12"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node



Transiting Saturn at 18 Capricorn had recently crested the Universal City chart's Dsc. In fact, if one looks back to the night of Universal's Oscar win for *All Quiet on the Western Front*, transiting Saturn was poised just off the Dsc at 7 Capricorn. Saturn's transit through the third quadrant of the natal chart is the phase when what was born and developed during Saturn's traversal of the second quadrant begins to see the light of day (an ironic term for *Dracula's* premiere). This, of course, begs the question: What was happening at Universal when Saturn transited the IC of the chart? What seeds were planted that would flower, in part, as the first great period of Universal horror, with Saturn's transit through the third quadrant?

It's unclear specifically what was happening in 1920 and 1921, when Saturn transited through Virgo, on the Universal City IC. By the time *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* opened in 1923, Saturn was at 18 Libra, and by the time of *The Phantom of the Opera's* premiere in 1925, Saturn had reached 17 Scorpio—near an exact semi-square to the Universal City IC. Lon Chaney reached the height of his powers after *Phantom*.

And the late Twenties proved a fruitful period for his frequent collaboration with director Tod Browning. As mentioned, '31's *Dracula* was supposed to have brought the two men together again. So, perhaps Chaney and Browning's labors through the late 1920s account, in part, for Saturn's transit through the second quadrant, thus *Dracula* and the beginning of a new phase in Universal horror when Saturn rose into the third.

With *Dracula* a hit, Universal quickly advanced to its next installment in horror—*Frankenstein*, which opened on November 21, 1931. Béla Lugosi, after his success in *Dracula*, was the natural first choice to play Frankenstein's Monster. But Mr. Lugosi famously turned down the part. The gods (and director James Whale) handed the plum role to another relatively unknown actor—Boris Karloff—whose performance as the Monster, yes, struck lightning.

Mr. Lugosi and Mr. Karloff would virtually own the horror genre in the early years of talking pictures. Water signs were featured in both men's natal charts, which would form strong synastry to the Water energy in the Universal City chart. Mr. Lugosi [born Béla Blaskó on October 20, 1882, 3:30 p.m., in Lugos, Romania] had 13 Pisces on his natal Asc, Jupiter in Cancer and Mars and Mercury in Scorpio. We don't have a time of birth for Mr. Karloff [born William Henry Pratt on November 23, 1887, in London, England], but his natal chart featured Moon in Pisces with Mercury and Jupiter in Scorpio.

Transiting Saturn's climb through the 7th, 8th, and 9th houses of the Universal City chart between 1931 and 1935 would indeed parallel the flowering stage in the evolution of Universal horror. 1932's output included *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Old Dark House*, and *The Mummy*. Claude Rains gave a notable performance as *The Invisible Man*, which opened on November 13, 1933. The first teaming of Mr. Karloff and Mr. Lugosi took place with *The Black Cat*, opening May 7, 1934. And 1935 gave us *Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Raven* (another Karloff/Lugosi partnership), and the first werewolf movie, *Werewolf of London*, in which actor Henry Hull suffered in lycanthropic style.

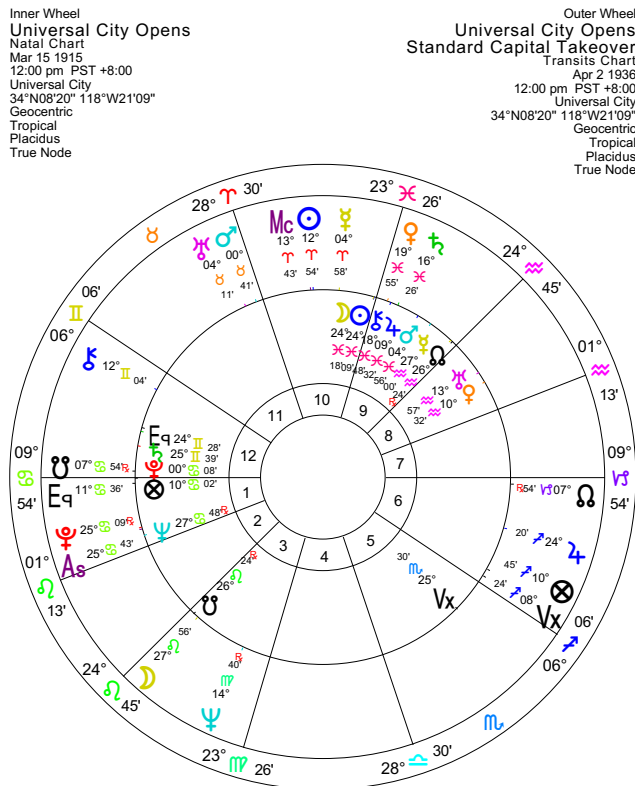
I would never suggest that Universal's only merit in the 1930s and '40s came through its horror output alone or that the Universal astrology charts concern nothing else. We're focusing here on the studio's horror films as they manifested one particular theme in these charts. Obviously, Universal's artistic potential was much richer than that, as indeed the studio succeeded in most of the standard film categories of the day—dramas, comedies, musicals, and westerns, as well as in lighter fare, such as a number of Saturday afternoon-type episodic serials. But perhaps even more dramatically, the Universal charts also speak to the destiny of the company as an enterprise through this period.

Junior Laemmle had planned a lavish remake of the musical *Showboat* for 1936. But earlier losses led to alarm among the stockholders, who demanded that, prior to *Showboat's* production, the Laemmles obtain a loan from Standard Capital Corporation to the tune of \$750,000—the collateral for which was the Laemmles' controlling interest in Universal. It was the first time in its history that Universal had borrowed money for a production. Alas, production costs rose \$300,000 over budget. With Universal unable to repay the loan, Standard Capital foreclosed and took control of the studio on April 2, 1936. Carl Laemmle, Sr., the man who had guided Universal since its incorporation in 1912 was out, and so was Junior. Forty-five days later, on May 17, 1936, *Showboat* opened—an artistic and commercial blockbuster. *Showboat's* profits might have saved the Laemmles' interest in Universal, had the money arrived in time. Their names appeared in the production credits, but in spite of the film's success—a testament to its producers' instincts—it was not enough for the new regime at Universal to bring back Carl Senior and Junior. Eclipses, progressions, and transits to the Universal City chart, building up to the April 2, 1936, takeover by Standard Capital, speak to imminent upheaval at the studio.

The transiting Lunar Nodes had been hovering near the Universal City Asc/Dsc axis from late 1935, roughly around 12 Cancer/Capricorn—and it was the South Node that was on the Asc. The Nodes, of course, mark the eclipse points. Therefore, the Solar Eclipse on December 25, 1935, fell at 3 Capricorn, conjunct the Universal City Dsc, and the Total Lunar Eclipse, preceding the event, fell into the 1st house at 17 Cancer 16, near the Universal City Asc. On the day of the takeover, the South Node was conjunct the Asc at 7 Cancer from the 12th house side, an orb of 2 degrees.

What's more, on April 2, 1936, the progressed Asc of the Universal City chart was at 26 Cancer 10, applying to a conjunction with natal Neptune at 27 Cancer 48. It speaks to a period of dissolution and perhaps confusion within the company. Indeed, even with the success of *Showboat*, which after all, must be considered a Neptunian project—the titular vehicle does reside on the water—Universal continued to face financial challenges that year.

[See below: bi-wheel, Universal City and Standard Capital Takeover] Among the transits for the takeover, Pluto had recently stationed retrograde at 27 Cancer, directly on the Universal City Neptune, on October 29, 1935—a bankruptcy-like portent to the modern-day planetary ruler of the Universal City MC (reputation, destiny). On the day of the takeover, transiting Jupiter, in the 6th house, was at his station degree of 24 Sagittarius, squaring both the Universal City MC/IC axis and the natal Sun-Moon conjunction. Saturn, however—coming from his natal 12th house position (secret enemies, self-undoing and “falls”) was transiting 16 Pisces, thus about to conjunct the Universal City MC and station there within a few months. Both Carl Senior and Junior were corporate heads of the company, represented symbolically by the Sun and/or the MC. As such, both men fell from power on the Saturn transit. Perhaps *Showboat* should have been the Laemmles’ greatest cinematic accomplishment. Without Saturn’s influence, was the Jupiter transit supposed to have brought them acclaim and accolades to justify future projects on the same scale? Or was Jupiter the overconfidence and overspending that brought them down? Or was he both? Carl Senior died three years later on September 24, 1939. Junior never made another film. He died on September 24, 1979, on the 40th anniversary of his father’s death.



Given the astrology, we’re not surprised that 1936 was a turning point in the life of Universal Studios. In spite of the Laemmles’ fall from power, and the nail-biting that went on over money, there were other memorable successes besides *Showboat*. *My Man Godfrey* with stars William Powell and Carole Lombard (who’d been borrowed from other studios) opened on September 17, 1936. It garnered six Oscar nominations and lives on as one of the greatest screwball comedies ever. And late in the year, 15-year-old Deanna Durbin’s first film, *Three Smart Girls*, which

opened December 20, 1936, made her an overnight star and made a big bundle of money for Universal. We're told, in fact, that Ms. Durbin's early musicals helped save Universal from bankruptcy (again?). She would stay on with the studio until her last film in 1948, retiring as the highest-paid woman in Hollywood. Thereafter, she moved to France to live as quietly and privately as possible with her husband and family until her death in 2013 at the age of 91. Her entire career had taken place prior to her first Saturn return—but that's another story...

Initially, it didn't seem that the new regime at Universal was much in favor of the horror genre. *Dracula's Daughter*, something of a sequel to 1931's *Dracula*, and one of the last classics from the early period, opened on May 11, 1936, just a few days before *Showboat*. But late in the decade, the second generation, if you will, of Universal horror got off the ground with *Son of Frankenstein*, which opened on January 13, 1939. Boris Karloff performed the role of the Monster for the last time. Of note among the transits for the opening were transiting Jupiter at 3 Pisces, conjunct the Universal City Mars, trine the Asc and heading for his natal-placement return within a month. Transiting Neptune was at his station retrograde degree of 23 Virgo, directly on the Universal City IC. Saturn, by then at 12 Aries in the 10th house, had already begun his transit through the fourth quadrant, which is said to be a time of reaping rewards. And indeed, so it would seem that the Universal monsters were about to reincarnate as a lucrative product through a host of sequels. But there was still one great original in Universal's stable of classic horror left to rear his hairy head.

The long years of transiting Neptune's sextile to transiting Pluto began to take shape in the late 1930s and early '40s. The sextile phase in the cycle indicates that which was born on the conjunction now becomes fully integrated into the pattern of life. 1940 was the year of the first Invisible Man sequel, *The Invisible Man Returns*, and the first Mummy sequel, *The Mummy's Hand*. More important, in early 1941, Creighton Chaney, who by then was billing himself as Lon Chaney, Jr., signed a contract with Universal Studios. His first horror film there, *Man Made Monster*, opened on March 28, 1941.

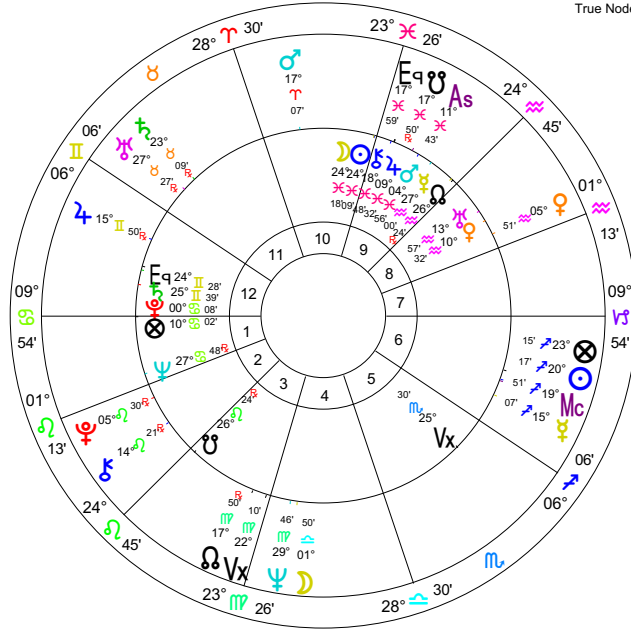
By late 1941, Neptune was stationing at 29 Virgo and Pluto was retrograding at 5 Leo, i.e., within a 6° orb for the sextile. Certainly by then, monster movies and Universal seemed pretty synonymous. We're led to believe that the Universal monster flicks of the early '40s were mostly B-grade affairs. I would argue that point, but certainly the great exception to that notion had to be *The Wolf Man*, which opened on December 12, 1941. Leonard Maltin's film and video guide called it "One of the finest horror films ever made." And indeed, *The Wolf Man* excelled through a stellar cast, a great script, and of course, through the indelible performance of Lon Chaney, Jr.

Progressions at the time of *The Wolf Man's* opening were propitious for something new to emerge within Universal's horror realm—and perhaps for the studio altogether. The Universal City chart's progressed Asc had changed signs earlier that year to 0 Leo. And in fact, in January 1941, Abbott and Costello, Universal's box-office-bonanza team of the next decade had their first starring vehicle there, *Buck Privates*.

[See page 15: bi-wheel, Universal City and WOLF MAN Opens] Transits for *The Wolf Man's* premiere included Neptune at 29 Virgo conjunct the World Axis (0 Libra), square natal Pluto and finishing up a separating opposition to natal Sun-Moon in Pisces. Transiting Saturn was at 23 Taurus, in the 11th house, sextile the Universal MC, and semi-square the Asc. Note that for the opening of *The Wolf Man*, Chaney Jr.'s most famous vehicle, transiting Saturn (23 Taurus) was in a period of opposing the placement of transiting Saturn (17 Scorpio) 16 years prior in 1925 for the opening of Chaney Sr.'s most famous vehicle, *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Inner Wheel
 Universal City Opens
 Natal Chart
 Mar 15 1915
 12:00 pm PST +8:00
 Universal City
 34°N08'20" 118°W21'09"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node

Outer Wheel
 Universal City Opens
 THE WOLF MAN Opens
 Transits Chart
 Dec 12 1941
 12:00 pm EST +5:00
 Washington
 38°N53'42" 077°W02'12"
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 True Node

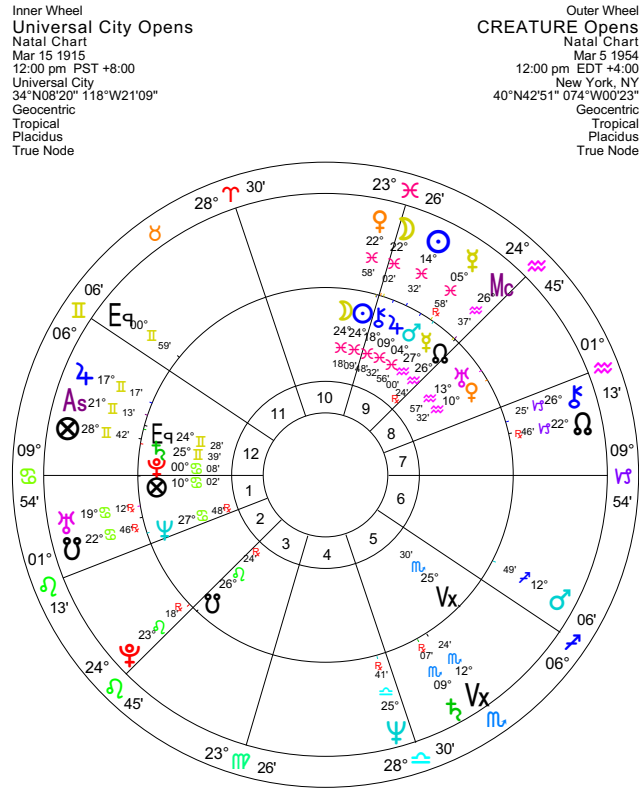


The Wolf Man opened five days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. And given the number of horror pictures produced during the war years, the classic monsters seem to have maintained their popularity with the public. 1942 gave us *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, *The Mummy's Tomb*, and one particularly fun entry—*Invisible Agent*, in which the Invisible Man, here played by Jon Hall, goes undercover in the extreme to fight Axis powers in Germany.

Not surprisingly, the denouement of Universal's great "horror cycle" coincided with Saturn's first return to his natal 12th house position in the Universal City chart, as well as the completion of his transit through the fourth quadrant. Indeed, around the time that Saturn entered Gemini, "doubling up" on the monsters became a trend. For example, Saturn was at 6 Gemini for *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, premiering on March 5, 1943, the first teaming of two classic Universal monsters. The Saturn return period of late 1943 to mid-1944 gave us *Son of Dracula* and *The Invisible Man's Revenge*. Saturn had entered Cancer by the time of *The Mummy's Ghost* on July 7, 1944, and Saturn was conjunct the Universal City Asc for both *House of Frankenstein* on December 1, 1944, and *The Mummy's Curse* on December 22, 1944. Fittingly, Frankenstein's Monster, the Wolf Man, and Dracula were all on hand when the curtain came down on their reign at the studio in *House of Dracula* on December 7, 1945. By that time, Saturn, at 24 Cancer, had finished with the fourth quadrant and was well into the 1st house, commencing a new phase of expression.

After the war years and into the 1950s, science fiction dethroned the classic, Gothic monsters to some extent until they were rediscovered by a new generation of us TV kids in the Fifties and Sixties. However, Universal did manage to give us one last icon of terror when the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* crept forth from Neptune's watery depths on March 5, 1954. Need I point out that for an event such as this, the Water signs were out in force: With six planets in Water that day—four in Pisces, including both luminaries, Saturn in Scorpio, and Uranus in Cancer. Sun, Mercury, and Saturn were forming a grand trine to the Universal Cancer Asc. And the

Neptune-Pluto sextile was forming a close yod with the Universal MC in Pisces. [See below: bi-wheel, Universal City and CREATURE Opens]



With the publication of this article, the transiting Lunar Nodes will be conjunct the Universal City MC/IC axis at 23 Virgo/Pisces in mid-January 2016, and Jupiter stations retrograde on the Universal City IC at 23 Virgo on January 7. In light of this, before closing, I must thank the gods and goddesses at NCGR New York—that most Olympian of all astrology chapters—for giving me the opportunity and the space to expound upon this topic that is, obviously, dear to my heart. I only wish that I could have paid more detailed tribute to many other Universal artists, both in front of and behind the camera, who contributed their talents to these enduring and beloved films: Leading men such as Colin Clive, George Zucco, Lionel Atwill, Basil Rathbone, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Peter Lorre, John Carradine, and Vincent Price. A couple of great villainesses—Gale Sondergaard and Gloria Holden. The leading women—Mae Clarke, Gloria Stuart, Valerie Hobson, Elena Verdugo, Ilona Massey, Anne Gwynne, and two special favorites—Nan Grey and the woman nicknamed the “Queen of the Screamers”—Evelyn Ankers. The memorable character actors—Dwight Frye, Ernest Thesiger, O.P. Heggie, J. Edward Bromberg, J. Carroll Naish, Doris Lloyd, and Una O’Connor. Special effects by the great John P. Fulton. Stylish gowns by Vera West. Writers such as Curt Siodmak and John R. Balderston. And the directors, among them, Karl Freund, Erle C. Kenton, and George Waggnar.

Saturn’s transit through the second, third, and fourth quadrants of the Universal City chart clearly mapped the evolution of Universal’s horror films from the late Twenties through the mid-Forties. But as a reminder, the Universal City chart featured natal Saturn in *Gemini*. Therefore, in as much as this story belongs to Saturn, with due respect to the hundreds of artists who contributed, the success of classic Universal horror owes largely to the work of *two fathers* and sons. In the end, Carl Laemmle, Sr., surely was gratified by his decision to promote his son Junior to head of production. Only the gods can know why the Laemmles were not

fated to continue on and give us more great movies. But certainly, even now, 100 years since Uncle Carl first opened the doors to Universal City, the Laemmles' inventive hands still show. Furthermore, as marked by Saturn's arc around the chart, the advent and the twilight of classic Universal horror was bookended by the career highlights of Lon Chaney and his son Creighton. Born on a Lunar Eclipse, Creighton Chaney might have initially seemed fated to live in the shadow of his father's blazing light. But ultimately, Creighton would attain his own unique luminary status—a career, a body of work, and a legacy in movie history, most memorably through one great role that was all his own.

I mentioned that on the night when the Lumière brothers gave symbolic birth to the movies in 1895, Neptune got the final word, and likewise, I must give the final word to the planetary ruler of the movies. 1932's *The Mummy* is the story of a resuscitated mummy's pursuit of his lost love—an ancient Egyptian princess who has been reincarnated into 20th Century Egypt. Boris Karloff played the Mummy; Zita Johann, the heroine, Helen Grosvenor. In order to unite them, he must sacrifice the girl and then bring her back to unnatural life like himself. At the end of the picture, he has managed to take her soul back to ancient times, but her modern day incarnation resists. Just as he's about to kill her, she calls upon the goddess Isis to save her. The goddess intervenes and strikes down the Mummy, reducing him to ashes. Helen faints. The wise Egyptologist, Dr. Muller, played by Edward Van Sloan, and Helen's boyfriend, Frank Whemple, played by David Manners, rush to her aid:

Frank: *Helen!*

Dr. Muller: *Call her! He has dragged her back to ancient Egypt. Call her! Her love for you may breach the centuries!*

Frank: *Helen. Helen. Come back. It's Frank. Come back.*

[(Music swells.) Helen revives.]

There is something deliciously Neptunian in that moment for me always. It's a great finale to a great horror picture, of course. But the power to "breach the centuries" never fails to remind me of Neptune's wondrous power to dissolve time and space and through him, the wondrous power of the movies to transport us and connect us. It could be a journey back in time to ancient Egypt or just to 1964, on a Sunday afternoon, when I stood in line with my mother at the State Exhibit Museum in Shreveport, Louisiana, to get the Wolf Man's autograph.

Gene Shaw is an NCGR-PAA Level IV certified astrologer who currently serves on the Board of Examiners. He is also a contributing editor to NCGR E-News Commentary.