"Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" (20th Century Fox, 1939)
Directed by Alfred Werker; Associate Producer - Gene Markey;
Art Directors, Richard Day, Hans Peters; music by Cyril Mockridge;
photographed by Leon Shamroy; edited by Robert Bischoff; based on
the play by William Gillette. 9 reels.

With Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Ida Lupino, George Zucco, Alan Marshall,
Terry Kilburn, Henry Stephenson, E.E. Clive, Arthur Hohl, May Beatty, Peter
Wiles, Mary Gordon, Holmes Herbert, Georges Regas, Mary Forbes, Frank Dawson,
William Austin, Anthony Kemble Cooper, G. Montague Shaw.

A follow-up to the first of the Rathbone-Holmes films, "The Hound of the
Baskervilles", "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" has a less famous story
to fall back on, and not quite such careful production values. Nor does its
plot have quite such an enjoyable atmosphere of horror. Yet it remains an
excellent mystery, stylishly done, and in some ways is superior to its
predecessor. It's faster-paced for one thing, and has more of a spirit of
fun in its sportsmanlike tiltings between Professor Moriarty, "the genius
of evil" who plans "a crime to stir the Empire" and Holmes ("...always
Holmes, until the end" as Moriarty puts it). And to a non-Holmes afficionado
(that is to say, an admirer of the character, but with a very limited
knowledge of the Doyle stories) it seems to me that the screenplay by Edwin
Blum and William Drake catches just the right spirit, and works out the
multiple complications extremely neatly. It is far too good a film to be
so little known, and one wonders why "Hound" (directed by the far less
talented Sidney Lanfield) is the one that always gets all the attention.
With its crisp photography and impressive sets (many of them standing sets
neatly dressed up and pressed into service), this is one of the most handsome
screen treatments that Holmes has ever been afforded, and after such an
auspicious beginning, it's a pity that Fox didn't continue the series. As it
was, Universal took over (retaining Rathbone and Bruce) with a much cheaper
series, all of them modernised into the 2nd World War period. Many of them
were good fun, but none were up to the standards set by these two Fox films.

The cast is full of old friends. Rathbone is fine as Holmes, and has a
diverting moment when, disguised as a music-hall singing comic, he fast steps
his way through "I do like to be beside the seaside". Good old George Zucco
makes a marvellous Moriarty, one of the best of a long line of evil professors
who also included Gustav von Seyffertitz, Ernest Torrence, Lionel Atwill and
Henry Daniell. Ida Lupino is rather unattractively made up, costumed and
photographed, but the rest of the English contingent - Mary Forbes, Henry
Stephenson et al - more than make up for that.

The climax, set in the Tower of London, is excitingly done - all height,
shadows, spiral stairs and muffled breathing. It's a pity to see Moriarty
come to such a grade-B end as a fist-fight and subsequent fall to death --
but happily one can assume that the wily professor, like Fu Manchu and Dr.
Mabuse, is really indestructible and will be back to plague Holmes another
day!

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THE LAUREL & HARDY MURDER CASE (Hal Roach-MGM, 1930) Directed by James
Parrott; photographed by Walter Lundin; 3 reels
With Laurel and Hardy, Lon Poff, Fred Kelsey, Stanley Blystone.

Like the majority of Laurel & Hardy's 3-reelers, this one is a bit labored
and padded, and would be better at two reels. But, it's an unfamiliar one,
and one we haven't run before, so any "new" title in the dwindling supply
of unplayed L&H comedies is something to look forward to. ("Another Fine
Mess" and "Bethyl Marke" are due shortly, incidentally). Despite the age
of some of the gags, it manages to remain constantly amusing and is often extremely funny. It is also quite grim, and its haunted house, one-murder-
after-another flavor, with bats, lightning, and all the trimmings, must have
made it quite a scary item for the youngsters.

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THE MUMMY (Universal, 1932) Directed by Karl Freund; scenario by John
Balderston; story by Nina Wilcox Putnam and Richard Schayer; photographed
by Charles Stumar. 7 reels.

With Boris Karloff, Zita Johann, Edward Van Sloan, David Manners, Arthur
Byron, Bramwell Fletcher, Noble Johnson, Leonard Mudie, Katheryn Byron, Eddie
Kane, Tony Karlow, Maes Crane, Arnold Grey, Henry Victor, Georges Regas.

One of the least appreciated, and quite one of the best horror films of the
early thirties, "The Mummy" is a strange, leisurely, stylish work, as much a
cameraman's film as "The Cat and the Canary" had been an art director's.

Enjoying a brief fling at directing, Karl Freund (who photographed last week's
"Murders in the Rue Morgue", and was to direct another off-beat horror film,
"Mad Love", from "Hands of Orlyac") brought the same kind of stylish
romanticism to this film that Epstein had brought to "The Fall of the House
of Usher". The camera is endlessly sweeping, probing, and somehow never at
quite the speed of life; at times it seems to slow down to an inexorable
plodding death march, which seems to say "There is no hurry -- but there is no
escape either!" Physical horror is at a minimum, and the more effective
because of it; the scene where the Mummy first comes to life is one of the
few genuinely horrifying moments that the screen has ever given us, ranking
with the dream-burial in "Vampyr", the mirror sequence in "Dead of Night" and
the unmasking in "Mystery of the Wax Museum" -- yet actually very little
happens. Matching the mood of the camera is the music -- slow, oppressive,
mythic, and tremendously effective. "The Mummy" was the first of the Universal
horror films to use music throughout.

Karloff is superb, like Lon Chaney mixing malevolence, repugnance and yet a
definite sensitivity too with consumate ease -- and the eerie closeups of his
face and eyes are as chilling as ever. The supporting cast has all of
Universal's stock company from the genre, save Dwight Frye. David Manners is
as pleasing, naive and useless as always; "Make yourself agreeable to our
guest" his father tells him at one point, and that is really the sum total
of his contribution for seven whole reels. Bramwell Fletcher goes mad in an
uneasily convincing manner, and dear old Edward Van Sloan does Professor Van
Helsing all over again, as well informed on the curses of Amen-Ra and the
mysteries of the Hill of the Seven Jackals as he is on vampirism. At one
point, coming to an important decision concerning the Mummy, he announces
dramatically "We must destroy it!" -- and recalling his like decisions about
Frankenstein's monster and Dracula, one can't help smiling a little at the
macabre and bloodthirsty, yet withal rather fascinating, but that Universal
had gotten him into!

The print is in fine condition and quite complete, even having the wonderfully
elaborate main title that was removed in favor of a simple freeze-frame when
Realart reissued the film some years ago. It goes without saying that it is
far and away the best of the many Mummy films, which, for the record, also
took in "The Mummy's Hand" (best of the follow-ups), "The Mummy's Tomb"
(a weak one), "The Mummy's Ghost" (fair), "The Mummy's Curse" (silly, but
rather good fun), "Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy", and Hammer's recent
dull "remake" of the original.

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William K. Everson ---