"CRIME WITHOUT PASSION" (Paramount, 1934) Written, produced and directed by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, from an original short story "A Caballero of the Law" by Hecht, published in the Saturday Evening Post; Camera: Lee Garmes; Montage/Special Effects: Sliavko Vorkapich Settings by Albert R. Johnson. 7 reels
With Claude Rains, Margo, Stanley Ridges, Whitney Bourne, Paula Trueman, Leslie Adams, Gretta Granstedt, Esther Dale, Charles Kennedy, Fuller Mellish, and Helen Hayes and Fannie Brice as extras.

The liveliest of the four films that Hecht and MacArthur made at Paramount's Long Island studio in the mid-30's ("The Scoundrel" was probably the best, "Sooch the Rich" quite certainly the weakest, and "Once in a Blue Moon" the oddest), "Crime Without Passion" is a fascinating display of uninhibited literary ego-sentimentality and bizarre visual fireworks. Reputedly the whole period of filming degenerated into a kind of disorganised combination spree and bender, and most of the physical work of getting a movie ground out fell back on the shoulders of Lee Garmes (who on other and later occasions has taken co-director credits along with his camera duties). The self-indulgence and earlier air of underminesmanship certainly shows through, but without the discipline with which Orson Welles controlled his unorthodox talents. It's bizarre, flamboyant and theatrical - but then that's the kind of story it is, and within its own short and punchy framework, it works well. Any film that by virtue of story-twists and brittle dialogue can maintain the pitch of interest engendered by its flashy montage opening obviously has to have a great deal of talent involved somewhere, erratic or not. (This eye-popping opening montage is usually cut on tv incidentally, just as the stunning newsworthy sequence at the head of "Keen" is frequently a tv casualty). Like most of Paramount's Long Island films, it suffers from a paucity of exterior locations and rather obvious backdrops outside windows etc., but it makes the most of the studio's own decor -- the dressing rooms, an iron staircase etc. are all pressed into service for the backstage scenes and withal it's quite a handsome film. Claude Rains' bravura performance is a fine piece of nastiness, and appropriately detached from reality; those other great shyster lawyers, John Barrymore and Warren William, would have won far too much of our sympathy in this role.

"THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK" (Paramount, 1933) Directed by Stuart Walker Asst. Director, Mitchell Leisen; story by John Monk Saunders; adapted by Bogart Rogers and Seton Miller; photographed by Harry Fischbeck; 7 rls
With Fredric March, Cary Grant, Carole Lombard, Jack Oakie, Sir Guy Standing, Forrest Harvey, Leyland Hodgson, Russell Scott, Kenneth Howell, Douglas Scott, Crawford Kent, Paul O'manesi, Jacques Jou-Jervis, Robert Manning, Adrienne d'Ambriocourt, York Sherwood, Olaf Hytten, Lane Chandler, Dennis O'Keefe.

The World War One aviation cycle that started with 1927's "Wings" and was to conclude with 1938's "The Dawn Patrol" was here in its sixth year, and like Rko's "Ace of Aces" was basically a programmer cashing in on a popular cycle, and cutting a lot of economical corners. Much of the spectacular aerial footage is lifted from "Wings", and new combat scenes are done largely with back projection - a device conspicuously absent from "Hell's Angels". Nevertheless, it's a tight, compact and extremely well-done film, with its programmer status no stigma at all. John Monk Saunders, who had written a large percentage of the earlier air epics, here turns out a story that was quite out of the standard rut of its day. It's up-to-date enough to fit into what current critics so conveniently label "anti-hero" war films.

But there's no time wasted over prolonged soul-searching, and in keeping with the generally fast-paced development, that pleasant old device of introducing the characters pictorially in the credits is used in a quite creative sense by showing the leads in scenes that do not subsequently form a part of the picture proper, in a series of deft images we get to know the characters and their backgrounds, so that when we meet them again we know enough about them for no further explanations, flashbacks or other details to be necessary.