"SPAWN OF THE NORTH" (Paramount, 1936) Directed by Henry Hathaway
Produced by Albert Lewin; Screenplay by Talbot Jennings and Jules Furthman from a story by Barrett Willoughby; Camera: Charles Lang; Associate Director, Richard Talmadge; Music, Paul Whiteman; 10 reels.

Presumably designed as an eccentical "big" picture to follow-up Hathaway's previous "Souls at Sea", "Spawn of the North" is vastly enjoyable, but frankly a "B" picture masquerading as an epic. Although never dull, and certainly full of incident and interesting characters, it is relatively lightweight action and could benefit from being a good deal tamer. Although no credit is given, its plot is an obvious though ingenious recording of "The Virginian", re-arranged to emphasize the good breeding of Raft, in legitimate version of "The Virginian" the important but lesser role of Steve (Richard Arlen, Sonny Tufts, etc.). Despite its portentous closing speech, it never convinces one that it is anything more important than a western with salmon substituting for cattle, and normally what was honest enough. It was released again, as "Alaska Saga", a much cheaper production but one that had a good deal more of the documentary footage (the Indian ceremonial, for example) shot for this film and not used. The location scenes are impressive but sketchy, their very quality working against conviction when cut in with obvious studio sets. The one big fight scene, masterminded by Richard Talmadge (who can be seen dubbing for Raft throughout the film) is astonishingly vigorous and brutal for that particular period in Hollywood. The cast is a handsome one, though it's a pity to see John Barrymore as fifth billing. However, the best performances in the film are not those of the principals and not necessarily in this order: Dorothy Lamour, most appealing in the pathetic "mumbab other woman" role that she did so well, Akia Talmadge in one of her best bravura villain roles, and a most engaging seal, whose underplaying helps to offset Nana Barymore and Talmadge.

"COME AND GET IT" (Sam Goldwyn-United Artists, 1936) Directed by Howard Hawks and William Wyler; 2nd unit director (logging sequences) Richard Rosson; Screenplay by Jane Murfin and Jules Furthman from the novel by Elmer Berber; Music by Alfred Newman; Camera, Gregg Toland and Rudolph Mate; Art Direction, Richard Day; Costumes, Orra Kimm; Special Effects, Wernher. A production of the United Artists Corporation.

One always has justifiable cause for alarm when an Elmer Berber adaptation starts out with a title like, as here, "1924", especially since the film is also an Edward Arnold vehicle. The combination is fraught with dire possibilities. But fortunately here, Miss Berber's caveloading runs out of epochas fairly quickly, and limits itself to two more generations. Furthermore, its empire-building story-line is, for once, made far more a legitimate part of the development and isn't just a showy backdrop on which to hang sundry dynasties and maudlin subplots. Admittedly, the early heaving sequences - done by Howard Hawks and Richard Rosson - are easily the best, generating genuine excitement and a real sense of period. As a child I remember being greatly disappointed that this aspect was dropped so quickly. Nevertheless, the rest of the film is good strong drama in the best old Goldwyn-Berber-Arnold tradition, has a fine leading performance from Frances Farmer, a lovely Newman score, sumptuous mounting, and listening cameo-work from Toland and Mate that is a sheer pleasure to watch. Even Walter Brennan, so over-coded at the time as being another Paul Muni (as if there was room enough), is less obnoxious than usual and even rather touching, in a role that originally was to have been played by John Qualen but had Ford been directed. After having had Blanco Sheats dissatisfied with them, the roles in "Come and Get It" because she was in her thirties, it is no less distasteful to find Edward Arnold being discussed here as an "old man" of 50! But it's always good to see Arnold in such a role, even if it is Diamond Jim all over again, and if the film itself, in Berber fashion, loses steam a little as it progresses, Arnold compensate by stepping up the power of his performance until it reaches a traditional Arnold dramatic/pathetic crescendo for the fadeout. Norcom's role is surprisingly small, and the film remains an Arnold-Farmer showcase, and a much better one than their subsequent "The Toast of New York."