In the mid-30's, Gaumont-British produced a handful of slightly lower echelon thrillers to cash in on the market created by their Alfred Hitchcock films, without either competing with them or overlapping in any way. Using stories by writers like Greeneheim, and good directors (Robert Stevenson) and good writers and players, they were at least often quite humorous films, modest in ambition but polished in execution. "Strange Sounding" and "Non-Stop New York" were two of the best, and the latter - tonight's film - also benefited (in Britain at least) from the likeable new screen team of John Loder and Anna Lee, who had earlier co-starred in "The Man Who Changed His Mind" (with Farlow) and "King Solomon's Mines", and would appear together much later, for John Ford, in "Seven Men as Sweeney" and "Cimarron's Day". Next to Hitchcock, Robert Stevenson (then married to Anna Lee) was Gaumont's most reliable director and thriller director. Hitchcock (and Loder) moved to Hollywood in the early 40's. Apart from being a good thriller, "Non-Stop New York" is interesting historically in being the last of an unofficial futuristic trilogy in which Gaumont British made some daring (but unfulfilled) prophecies about Atlantic travel. With the idea of transatlantic air travel considered a dangerous impossibility in 1933, they made as a German co-production "U.F.I. Doesn't Answer" dealing with the establishment of a mid-Atlantic flying aerodrome to refuel and resupply planes, and thus cut the flying distance in half. (The steampunk comics tried to sabotage it!) In 1935, considerate of pedestrian traffic needs, Gaumont-British and the Germans got together again for "Transatlantic Tunnel". (Jrntions magnetize, wary of the world peace the tunnel would supposedly though unexplainedly bring about, tried to wreck the project!) Then, a little over a year later, minus German collaboration, "Non-Stop New York" ("Its fictional enthusiasm cutstrips science" remarked the New York Times) set itself in the near future when non-stop giant airliner flies across the Atlantic would be possible. Over the giant jet of today, which carries a much larger passenger load than the uncommercial handful of this film, haven't quite caught up to its spurious modern design and technically dubious observation platform. Presumably too, in the late 30's the prime considerations were speed and comfort rather than speed; certainly detective Loder, performing above and beyond the call of duty, couldn't have clambered out of the plane and on to its wing at today's supersonic speeds.

For all of its fanciful elements though (and partially because of them) it's still a rattling good thriller, with Francis L. Sullivan stealing most of the thunder with his bravura villainy. Incidentally, thanks to some intercalated New York-shot footace, the film's American story-segments do carry a little more conviction than the average British thriller with NY locales. One still shudders to recall a later (and more elaborate) British thriller, "Fear Murderer", which kept NY business offices open on a key public holiday, and also had the hero (for an important story point) pick up a copy of the aristocratic/urban magazine The Tatler which someone had left lying around in a sleasy Times Square bar - the equivalent, at the very least, of "The Village East" being found in Fukuinham Felsee! One could be print and fully complete, but victoriously not as good as one would like; however, it is the only print in the country, and one must blame the shoddy standards of contemporary labs, not the always meticulous camerawork of Putz Greenheim.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

GREEN FOR... CHER (Don Eagle Lion, 1946) Produced by Frank Lauder and Sidney Gilliat; Directed by Sidney Gilliat; Screenplay by Gilliat and Claude Gueyney from the novel by Christiana Brand. Camera, Millie Cooper; Oswald Morris; Production Designer, Peter Ford. Music, William Alwyn; 9 reels

With Alastair Sim, Trevor Howard, Sally Gray, Leo Conn, Rosamund John, Legs Jenkins, Judy Campbell, Moore Marriott, Henry Edwards, Ronald Adam, George Woodbridge, Frank Ling.

Though less dynamic than "The Islaese Falcon" and "The Nemal, under Case", "Green For Danger" - in its own quiet way - is their equal as one of the genuine classics of the mystery/movie genre. Thus for it is the only film based on Christianity Brown's triumph of Inspector Cockrill mysteries. Cockrill was a_wise and deceptively easy-going detective who got his
start in wartime England. Since his area was Kent, the gentle rural country—
side between London and the South Coast, he was spared the pressures for
quick results that right have been visited on a Scotland Yard man, and was
able to work in the relaxed and seemingly aimless manner ofMr. Mas's
Inspector Mace. His initial cases were sometimes complicated by the war,
but only tangentially involved with it, Alastair Sim was a perfect choice
for the role, especially since in 1946 Sim was as well known as a dramatic
actor. His character, a kind of flamboyant and wasted and wasted) in new
productions, would be a more serious role. One of the J. Arthur Rank "prestige"
films of the 40's, "Green for Danger", was one of the few that seemed to have
successfully created the American market. It opened with a big splash at the
huge "inter Garden Theatre in New York, and collected a wave of rave
reviews and unanimous enthusiasm for Sim. A varied variety of ads sold it via
"class", melodrama, comedy and sex campaigns. Yet it wasn't long before its
well-earned reputation had been forgotten, and, retitled "The Lady Killer", it
was sent into the grind-house market on a double-bill with "Gang War", which
turned it into one of the "cut" seasons. "Green for Danger" is a very much a classic of its kind, the perfect trans-
lation of a comfortable and civilized mystery novel into an equally civilized
(broadly often far from comfortable) mystery movie. But even from the adroit
mixture of comedy and thrill and the smoothness of all the playing, that
really makes the film so unique in its species is its honesty and restraint.
The plot is a good one, and the film plays scrupulously fair with the
audience. There are no red herrings, no obviously symmetrical characters,
or any of the blissful, motiveless, ultra-theatrical characters who in the
average screen murder mystery often qualify for the position of No. 1 suspect.
Too, the interplay among the characters - comic, romantic,
dramatic, sad - is interesting and involving in itself, and not merely
welding to sustain the mystery. The clues are all there on the screen, yet
some of them elude the detective too, so that even he is partially taken
aback by the surprise ending, which is satisfying and logical as well as
sensuous. The film was produced by the Leander-Cilliet partnership, and earlier, as a writing team, worked on Hitchcock's "The Lady Vanishes" and
Reed's "Night Train to Munich". But it was written and directed by Cilliet,
who can now be seen to have dominated the team much as Billy Wilder dominated
the Mitter-Chales Freckett writer-producer-director team. If one would
expect from Leander and Cilliet, "Green for Danger" is witty, light-hearted
and unpredictable, its moments of terror and even visual horror being all
the more effective because of their lack of stereotyped buildup. The swinging
doors in the deserted dismally at night, opening and shutting only
fleetingly to reveal the silent presence at the lleg of and possible killer,
provide a stunning moment of the medium with a wounding of sound and image
that would have done credit to Val Lewton or James Whale. With an uncharacter-
istic lack of generosity, Alfred Hitchcock has gone on record as saying that
"Green for Danger" (and other later Leander-Cilliet films, some of which
were extremely good and not all of which were thrillers) doesn't work, and
implies that they should have stuck to writing. He tends to overlook the fact
that "The Lady Vanishes" was one of his very best films at least of a kind
because of its silent script, and that while he may have made better
than others, he never made a better detective mystery. The film is beautifully
cast from the lead players down to the supports, Donald Adam is especially good, sounding just the right note of objectiveness at the
closure. The essentially British idea was a little out of his depth as the
family head of Tessa in the London stage version of "Gene 1929 in the kind"
Equally good are the fine old actor-director veteran of the silent days,
Henry Edwards, and loopy Barretts as the salesman. Barretts's diction and
expertise as a character player make it hard to realize that he is also a
hole-at-a-time landscape снов ad the wondrously entertaining store so-called laughing
gas, saying that it's "the imurracies that cause the laughs" to which Sim
comments, "Just like our music halls"! Sim created such a delightful
character that critics both in England and America urged that he repeat the
role. (There had been a like reaction to Ralph Richardson's similarly astute
yet comic detective in 1932's "D Planes"). Fortunately the suggestion was
never acted upon, just as a succession of Doctor Sam Shires would have
cheapered The Alpsa Pelmen, so would a number of Cockrell sequels have
lessered the lasting impact of "Green for Danger". Sim did play (earlier, and later) several unusually humorous detective roles on screen, but he, and
"Green for Danger", retain the best of them all in this 1946 com...