"A Leap for Life" (Episode 14 of "Captain Kidd") (Star Serial Corp., 1922)
Directed by Burton King and J.P. McGowan; story by Anthony Coldeway, Philip
Lonergan and Lester Morgan; Camera, Frank Zucker, Jean Perkins; 2 reels
With Eddie Polo, Kathleen Myers, Bradley Parker, Morgan Jones.

The American Silent Serial is one of the most under-represented and over-
rated of all film genres, and in a very general sense one can say that the
best American serials of the 40's were superior to them. Nevertheless, the
silents were strong on mystery, imagination and lively stunt work, and
this good episode from an independent serial is typical. It was the last
serial of the very popular Eddie Polo, and is particularly interesting since
it was an East-Coast-produced film, played out against recognisable New
Jersey and New York backgrounds.

"THE WHISTLE" (William S. Hart Productions-Paramount, 1921) Written and
directed by Lambert Hillyer; photographed by Joseph August; based on a
story by May Wilmot and Olm Lyman; 5 reels
With William S. Hart, Myrtle Stedman, Frank Brownlee, George Stone, Will
Jim Hatton, Richard Headrick, Robert Kortman, Leo Willis.

A curious forerunner of a Fox melodrama of the 30's, "Nancy Steele is Missing";
"The Whistle" was made when William S. Hart's tremendous popularity as a
western star was rapidly losing ground to the slicker, more actionful films
of Tom Mix. However, Hart had always made the occasional non-western, and this
film was in no way an attempt to change his basic screen image. Indeed, his
standard western hero is virtually transplanted into a contemporary story
and setting. Hart was a thoroughly dedicated film-maker, but he was a good
showman too: he includes just enough physical action to keep his Western
admirers happy, enough sentiment to keep the ladies happy, and since a key
element of the story is the death of a child, he kills him off early enough
so that there has been no time for children in the audience to identify with
him and thus become tragic by his demise. It's a slow but powerful little film,
typical of the rugged story-lines and emotional intensity that Hart and his
team (director Hillyer and cameraman August worked with him regularly, August
later becoming a John Ford regular too on such films as "They Were Expendable"
packed into all their films.

10 Minute Intermission

"THE GRIM GAME" (Paramount-Artcraft, 1919) Directed by Irving Willat; story
by Arthur B. Reeve and John Gray; screenplay by Walter Woods; camera,
J.C. Taylor; Art Director, Wilfred Buckland; 6 reels
With Harry Houdini, Tully Marshall, Ann Forest, Mac Busch, Augustus Phillips,

Even though it saves most of its action until the last half, "The Grim Game"
has such a good story and is so well directed that it even overcomes the
handicap of Houdini's unpersonable appearance and stillled acting. In essence,
it's a Fairbanksian romp - though without his personal tongue-in-cheek
gusto - and Arthur B. Reeve (author of "The Exploits of Elaine") has added
to it much of the flavor of the silent serials. Yet all of the mysterious
characters and happenings are neatly dovetailed and logically explained. The
plot must have seemed especially strong in 1919, though less novel today
through frequent repetition in such movies as "Circumstantial Evidence" and
"Beyond a Shadow of a Doubt". The stunts are well done, though often rather
dragged in by the heels. The final serial sequence is especially effective
in that its crash is the real thing, unintended in the script, and thus
captured somewhat abruptly by the camera. In 1919 Paramount exploited this to
the hilt, featured it in a newsreel and a special short, and proclaimed it a
"miracle" that Houdini escaped alive. Actually it seems more likely that
some hapless stuntmen may have perished in the wreck while Houdini watched
the whole thing from the ground. The closeups of Houdini in this scene are
obvious studio inserts, the obviously authentic stunt scenes in suspiciously
long-long-shots. If Houdini had been performing himself, his vanity would
certainly have demanded closeups to prove it. In his late 50's book on
Houdini, William Lindsay Cresham offers the surprising fact (with figures to
prove it) that "The Grim Game" was a complete boxoffice flop. It took in
about a fifth of what the average similar Paramount feature did, despite
being superior to many of them (including some of Doug's, like "In Again, Out
Again"). Presumably Houdini just couldn't be sold as a movie personality,
any more than Red Grange could in later years, but of his handful of
movies, "The Grim Game" is far and away the best.       - Ms. K.Everson -