THE PENGUIN POOL MURDER (Rko Radio, 1932) Directed by George Archainbaud. Executive Producer, David O. Selznick; Associate Producer, Kenneth MacGowan; Scenario by Willis Goldbeck from a novel by Stuart Palmer and a story by Lowell Brentano; Camera, Henry Gerrard; Music, Max Steiner; 7 reels. With Edna May Oliver, James Gleason, Marc Clarke, Donald Cook, Robert Armstrong, Clarence Wilson, Edgar Kennedy, Rochelle Hudson, Mary Mason, Guy Usher, James Donlin, Spec O'Donnell, Joe Harniman, William LeMaire, Gustav von Seyffertitz.

The first and one of the two best of the series of six Hildegard Winters mysteries made by Rko, "The Penguin Pool Murder" still has the freshness of most initial entries in movie detective series. The two lead roles could have been written for Oliver and Gleason, and they work beautifully as a team (Gleason played in all six, but Oliver dropped out after 5, replaced by Helen Broderick) and, less successfully, for Gleason and Pfitz). At first the series was carefully if not elaborately produced, and they were well spaced at only one a year; the last two with Pfitz however were tired and obvious "B"s. "Penguin" starts out beautifully and can't quite maintain the imagination of the opening reel, but it does keep nicely on the move, the plot - even up until the fadeout - has quite a few surprises (although the identity of the "mystery" killer is certainly not one of them) and the Oliver-Gleason repartee is consistently amusing, as are Oliver's caustic cracks to her schoolchildren. Charges. (Having given a bag to an obviously Jewish lad, she tells him that he's only supposed to hold it, not appraise it!)

Less important Rko product of the early-30's is not helped by the lack-lustre negative made for "preservation" and tv usage. Pictorially, this print has little zip or sparkle, although the camerawork is often quite imaginative and in original 35mm nitrate prints it undoubtedly looked a good deal better. There may also be a minor sound-track scratch in the middle portion of the film which may or may not be picked up by your projector. But if you hear the traditional "motor noise signifying a scratch, be assured it's in the print, not in the projector (or your mind) and it disappears fairly quickly.

--- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION ---

FROM HEADQUARTERS (Warner Brothers, 1933) Directed by William Dieterle;
Screenplay by Robert N. Lee and Peter Milne from an original story by Lee;
Camera, William Keiper; Art Director, Anton Grot; Edited by William Caveness; 7 reels.

With George Brent, Margaret Lindsay, Eugene Pallette, Henry O'Neill, Dorothy Burgess, Edward Ellis, Hugh Marlowe, Theodore Newton, Robert Cavanaugh, Ken Murray, Kenneth Thomson, Strang, Wilfred Lucas, Matt McGuire, Spencer Charteris, Hink Pink, Tom Wilson, Bradley Page, Frank Darion, Robert Homans, Murray Kinnell, Mike Kibbee, Edwin Stanley, Walter James, Frank Laue, Billy Bletcher, Harry Woods. (William Dieterle has a good speaking bit, relaying information over a telephone).

Still they come, these expert little Warner crime thrillers from the early and mid-30's. One would like to think that there was an endless reserve of them; there isn't, and we've played the best, but it's good to know that we have played still good solid little films like this one that we will not play again, and that we can still look forward to. Dieterle's directing average in these early years is quite astounding (six pictures, 1932, 3 in 1933, 4 in 1934 - and all good ones) not only in the number of them, but in their quality and self-assurance. For a German emigre, directing here only since 1931, he not only continued on to American (and Hollywood) thinking in a remarkably short period, but seemed out to prove that the traditional idea of German directing as being "thorough and peddling" (regardless of other merits) did not apply to him. His films have pace, zip, and often incredible speed. Much of "From Headquarters" seems like a dry-run for his brilliant "Pog Over Frisco" of the following year. It's not as consistent in its pacing and staccato editing as that film, but it's typical (and perfectly cast) hard-boiled Warner thriller. The murder victim, Kenneth Thompson, is only slightly less despised by Robert Barrat who universally hated by a battery of suspects than was Robert Barrat in "O, The Kennel Murder Case", but he has been cast as a German and Hollywood thinking in a remarkably short period, but seemed out to prove that the traditional idea of German directing as being "thorough and peddling" (regardless of other merits) did not apply to him. His films have pace, zip, and often incredible speed. Much of "From Headquarters" seems like a dry-run for his brilliant "Pog Over Frisco" of the following year.

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-- Wm. K. Everson

POST SCRIPT and SACK CLOTH AND ASHES Dept. In the notes for KIND OF CARDBOARDERS in our last program, I referred erroneously to a Fred Kohler-Evelyn Brent scene. Brent was there, Kohler was not. We looked at the Florey film thinking of in which they did share a scene was DAUGHTER OF SHANGHAI. Also, the Louise Brooks mystery was a Florey film. Original Academy records show that she played Lloyd Nolan's fiancée - a role referred to in the film, but excised. In response to my enquiry to her on this point, she wrote back: "I played a bit part. It was shot in 4 hours. I sat at a bar talking to Lloyd Nolan. A publicity still shows me smartly dressed wearing a black turban with a veil over my eyes. I never saw the picture but assume the scene was cut".

Program ends approx 10:20, followed by discussion period.