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THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (Part 1) (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I recently watched many (but not all) of the film and television adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle's THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, and here are my random comments:

MURDER AT THE BASKERVILLES (1937) is a bit of a mess. It's not the first of the adaptations--in fact, it's not an adaptation of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES at all. There were two English-language adaptations before this: 1921 with Ellie Norwood, and 1931 with Carlyle Blackwood. (There were also several German-language ones.) But this is basically an adaptation of "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" (and in fact, its original title was SILVER BLAZE). When it was released in the United States in 1941, it was retitled MURDER AT THE BASKERVILLES to capitalize on the success of the 1939 Basil Rathbone version of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES.

At the beginning, Holmes and Watson are invited to Baskerville Hall ten years after the events in THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (so clearly there was a plan to tie it to the more famous story even before the Rathbone film). There is also a subplot with Professor, who did not originally appear in either story. This is not unlike more recent filmmakers adding Hercule Poirot or Ariadne Oliver or Miss Marple to stories that did not originally have them. Moriarty shows up in the opening sequence, then disappears for over two-thirds of the film. He is the brains behind the plot, rather than Straker, and the film even incorporates the air gun from "The Adventure of the Empty House". The film also reveals at least part of the secret halfway through the film.

The film also stars Ian Fleming as Doctor Watson, but this is not the same Ian Fleming who wrote the James Bond novels. Wotner starred as Sherlock Holmes in four other films: one of which is a lost film. Fleming played Watson in four of these; Ian Hunter played Watson in THE SIGN OF FOUR (1932).

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1939) was the first of Basil Rathbone's portrayals of Sherlock Holmes., which explains why he received only second billing after Richard Greene (as Sir Henry Baskerville). It also sticks moderately closely to the book, although in the film Beryl really is Stapleton's sister.

The film histories of Lionel Atwill and John Carradine would make their characters played appear suspicious even without the shots of them with shifty eyes and their delivery of lines in an ambiguous or heavy-handed manner.

Nigel Bruce's Dr. Watson is not totally incompetent in this film, but often seems out of his depth, with expressions of confusion or surprise. I think these characteristics were built up in future Rathbone-Bruce films.

Due to the Production Code, Sir Hugo's companions speak of him as chasing the girl to wed her, rather than to rape her. And probably due to the prominence of the Barrymore family in Hollywood, the butler's name has been changed from Barrymore to Barryman.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1959), twenty years after Rathbone's portrayal, was the first color version. The opening sequence with Sir Hugo probably inspired the opening sequence of CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF two years later. (Having Sir Hugo kill the girl rather than have her die of fright is a Hammer touch not in the original, as was the spider.)

Andre Morrell as Watson is (to me, anyway) a vast improvement over Nigel Bruce's rather bumbling portrayal. Peter Cushing (as Holmes) is always a delight to watch. Christopher Lee as Sir Henry Baskerville, however, is often quite annoying.

Barrymore is once again named Barrymore, whether because the acting family was not as well known twenty years later in England, or because Hammer saw no reason to stray from Doyle in this area. This didn't stop Hammer from straying in many other ways: the Stapletons' relationship, history, and motivation; Selden's role vis-a-vis Holmes; etc,

Holmes is very preemptory with Watson, basically ordering him to Baskerville Hall, and at the end directing Watson to write to Sir Henry thanking him for the check (which was sent to Holmes) and the invitation (ditto).

[Part 2 of this article will appear next week.]

[-ecl]

THE EDGE OF PHYSICS: A JOURNEY TO EARTH'S EXTREMES TO UNLOCK THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE by Anil Ananthaswamy (book review by Gregory Frederick):

Overview: THE EDGE OF PHYSICS by Anil Ananthaswamy is a unique blend of travel narrative and scientific exploration. The book takes readers on an extraordinary journey to some of the world's most remote and extreme environments, where cutting-edge experiments in physics are being conducted. Through vivid descriptions and engaging storytelling, Ananthaswamy provides a fascinating look at the lengths to which scientists go to uncover the mysteries of the universe. Ananthaswamy travels to various extreme locations, including:

- The Atacama Desert in Chile, home to some of the world's most powerful telescopes.
- The South Pole, where experiments on cosmic microwave background radiation are conducted.
- The depths of underground laboratories in Canada and Europe, where scientists search for dark matter.
- The high altitudes of the Himalayas, where studies on cosmic rays take place.

Each chapter delves into the specific scientific endeavors taking place in these locations, from the search for dark matter and neutrinos to the study of the cosmic microwave background radiation and the quest to understand the nature of dark energy. Alongside the scientific discussions, Ananthaswamy shares personal anecdotes and interviews with the scientists working in these challenging environments, offering insights into their motivations and the obstacles they face.

The author's storytelling skillfully combines the excitement of travel with the intricacies of scientific research. Readers are transported to extreme locations and gain an appreciation for both the natural wonders and the scientific efforts taking place there. Ananthaswamy has a talent for making complex scientific concepts accessible to a general audience. His explanations are clear and concise, helping readers grasp the significance of the research being conducted.

By focusing on the personal stories of the scientists, the book humanizes the scientific process. The dedication, passion, and perseverance of these researchers are vividly portrayed. The author's vivid descriptions of the extreme environments enhance the reader's experience, making the book not just informative but also visually and emotionally engaging.

Conclusion: "The Edge of Physics" is a compelling read that offers a unique perspective on the quest to understand the universe. Anil Ananthaswamy's ability to merge travel writing with scientific exploration makes the book both informative and entertaining. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the frontiers of modern physics and the extraordinary efforts of scientists working in some of the most inhospitable places on Earth. Despite minor pacing issues and the inherent complexity of the topics, the book succeeds in making cutting-edge physics accessible and engaging to a broad audience. [-gf]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In last week's column, I managed to butcher the spelling of *two* Roman emperors' names: Maximinus Thrax and Elagabalus. The facts that there was an emperor Maximinius, and that Elagabalus is just hard to type are my only excuses.

While re-reading the collection of essays KEN BURNS'S THE CIVIL WAR: HISTORIANS RESPOND (edited by Robert Brent Topin, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-509330-8), I was struck by this speech:

"We all declare for Liberty; but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleased with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men's labor." [-Abraham Lincoln]

Applying this to Florida's claiming it is the "Freedom State" is, alas, all too easy.

And in keeping with my comments about Thomas Jefferson, I'll quote Richard Hofstadter, who spoke of him, saying, "The leisure that made possible his great writings on human liberty was supported by the labors of three generations of slaves."

However, in the same volume, Leon F. Litwack misses an important point when he notes that THE BIRTH OF A NATION conveyed such stereotypes as "The depraved black politician, the grinning Sambo, and the black rapist" without noting that not only were these slurs on African-Americans, but that the depraved white politician was hardly unknown, and that white slaveholders had been regularly raping their slaves for generations. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

If you can tell the difference between good advice
and bad advice, you don't need advice.
--Anonymous

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