



29 August 2006 XIII:1
THE THIEF OF BAGDAD (1924)
155 min.

Douglas Fairbanks...The Thief of Bagdad
 Snitz Edwards...His Evil Associate
 Charles Belcher...The Holy Man
 Julanne Johnston...The Princess
 Sojin...The Mongol Prince
 Anna May Wong...The Mongol Slave
 Brandon Hurst...The Caliph
 Tote Du Crow...The Soothsayer
 Noble Johnson...The Indian Prince
 Sam Baker...The Sworder (uncredited)
 Winter Blossom...The Slave of the Lute (uncredited)
 Mathilde Comont...The Persian Prince (uncredited)
 Jesse 'Lone Cat' Fuller...Undetermined Role (uncredited)
 Sadakichi Hartmann...His Court Magician (uncredited)
 Jesse Lasky Jr....Undetermined Role (uncredited)
 Etta Lee...The Slave of the Sand Board (uncredited)
 Scotty Matraw...Eunuch (uncredited)
 K.Nambu...His Counselor (uncredited)
 David Sharpe...Bit (uncredited)

Charles Stevens...His Awaker (uncredited)
 Charles Sylvester...Eunuch (uncredited)
 Jess Weldon...Eunuch (uncredited)

Directed by Raoul Walsh

Written by: Douglas Fairbanks (story, Elton Thomas),
 James T.O'Donohoe (adaptation), Lotta Woods
Produced by Douglas Fairbanks
Original Music by Mortimer Wilson
Cinematography by Arthur Edeson
Film Editing by William Nolan
Production Design and Art Direction by William
 Cameron Menzies
Costume Design by Mitchell Leisen

Selected for the National Film Registry by the National
 Film Preservation Board, 1996

RAOUL WALSH (11 March 1887, NYC—31 December 1980, Simi Valley, CA), directed 136 films, the last of which was *A Distant Trumpet* (1964). Some of the others were *The Naked and the Dead* (1958), *Band of Angels* (1957), *The King and Four Queens* (1956), *Battle Cry* (1955), *Blackbeard, the Pirate* (1952), *Along the Great Divide* (1951), *Captain Horatio Hornblower R.N.* (1951), *White Heat* (1949), *Cheyenne* (1947), *The Horn Blows at Midnight* (1945), *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), *High Sierra* (1941), *They Drive by Night* (1940), *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), *Sadie Thompson* (1928), *What Price Glory* (1926), *Evangeline* (1919), *Blue Blood and Red* (1916), *The Fatal Black Bean* (1915), *Who Shot Bud Walton?* (1914) and *Life of Villa* (1912). Between 1913 and 1915 Walsh acted in at least 35 films, including the role of John Wilkes Booth in D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS (23 May 1883, Denver--12 December 1939, Santa Monica) acted in 48 films, among them *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934), *The Iron Mask* (1929), *The Black Pirate* (1926), *Robin Hood* (1922), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *The Mollycoddle* (1920), *Wild and Woolly* (1917), *Double Trouble* (1915) and *The Lamb* (1915).

ANNA MAY WONG (January 3, 1905 - February 3, 1961) "was the first truly notable Chinese American Hollywood actress. Born Wong Liu Tsong...in Los Angeles, California, a daughter of a laundryman, she began playing bit parts as a teenager in the early days of Hollywood. Wong's first role was in Alla Nazimova's silent film *The Red Lantern* (1919) as an uncredited

extra. However, even with associations with a Hollywood power like Nazimova, her ethnicity prevented her from getting choice parts. Though her family had been in California since 1855, as a Chinese-American, Wong was considered "foreign" both through social prejudices of the time, and by law. Anti-miscegenation laws existed in California until 1948. Hollywood films of the silent era and early 1930s pre-code era sometimes flaunted the more conservative social mores of the time, but these restrictions were codified when the studios adopted the Hays Code in 1930, and began enforcing it in 1934. Wong's career was especially affected by the anti-miscegenation rules in the Code, since they prevented her from playing romantic roles with non-Asian actors. When MGM was casting for *The Good Earth* (1937), she was passed up for the lead female role of O-lan because Paul Muni, an actor of European descent, was to play Wang Lung, O-lan's husband. Even though Muni was to wear heavy make up to look Asian, industry regulations prevented her from playing romantic roles opposite actors of different ethnicity. Instead, the role Wong hoped for went to Luise Rainer. Despite this discrimination, she had a number of significant film roles. Her first starring role was in Hollywood's first color movie *The Toll of the Sea* (1921). Anna May travelled throughout Europe, and was one of the leads in the British film *Piccadilly* (1929). In *Java Head* (1934) she starred opposite actor John Loder as a Chinese princess married to a 19th-century English gentleman. She also made films in German and French. In addition, she co-starred with Marlene Dietrich in *Shanghai Express* (1932) and with Lana Turner in *Portrait in Black* (1960), though she typically earned far less than her billing would indicate. For her work in *Shanghai Express*, she received \$6,000 in comparison to Dietrich's more than \$78,000. Many critics, however, believed that she stole the film from Dietrich with her intense performance, despite only playing a supporting role, and the two actresses never worked together again. She toured extensively on the stage throughout Europe and the U.S., including opposite Vincent Price in *Princess Turandot*, a stage version of Giacomo Puccini's opera." (from Wikipedia)

ARTHUR EDESON (24 October 1891, NYC—14 February 1970, Agoura Hills, CA) shot 137 films, among them *The Fighting O'Flynn* (1949), *My Wild Irish Rose* (1947), *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944), *Casablanca* (1942), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *They Drive by Night* (1940), *Each Dawn I Die* (1939), *Nancy Drew...Reporter* (1939), *They Won't Forget* (1937), *Satan Met a Lady* (1936), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), *Here Comes the Navy* (1934), *The Invisible Man* (1933), *The Last Mile* (1932), *Frankenstein* (1931), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *Robin Hood* (1922), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), and *The Dollar Mark* (1914).

From 1001 Movies you Must See Before You Die. Steven Jay Schneider, ed. Barron's, London, 2005

The Thief of Bagdad marked the culmination of Douglas Fairbanks's career as the ultimate hero of swashbuckling costume spectacles. It is also one of the most visually breathtaking movies ever made, a unique and integral conception by a genius of film design, William Cameron Menzies. Building his mythical Bagdad on a six-and-a-half-acre site (the biggest in Hollywood history), Menzies created a shimmering, magical world, as insubstantial yet as real and haunting as a dream, with its reflective floors, soaring minarets, flying carpets, ferocious dragons, and winged horses.

As Ahmed the Thief in quest of his Princess, Fairbanks—bare-chested and with clinging silken garments—explored a sensuous eroticism in his screen persona, and found an appropriate costar in Anna May Wong, as the Mongol slave girl. Although the nominal director was the gifted and able Raoul Walsh, the overall concept for *The Thief of Bagdad* was Fairbanks's own, as producer, writer, stuntman, and a showman of unbounded ambition. (Side note: the uncredited Persian Prince in the film is played by a woman, Mathilde Comont.)

from World Film Directors, Vol.I. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987
entry by Philip Kemp

"Raoul" (Albert Edward) Walsh, American director, scenarist, producer, and actor, was born in Manhattan, the

second of four children. His father, Thomas Walsh, was one of four brothers who had emigrated from Ireland via Spain, having at least according to his son's account—helped *their* rebel father break out of Dublin jail. Once he had arrived in New York, Thomas Walsh resumed his profession as a men's clothing designer and married Elizabeth Brough, a strikingly attractive woman of mixed Irish-Spanish blood. The family was prosperous and sociable; Walsh grew up in a large brownstone on East 48th Street and later in a palatial mansion on Riverside Drive, both of which were constantly filled with visitors. Among those whom he recalled meeting during his boyhood were Edwin Booth, Buffalo Bill Cody, Enrico Caruso, Mark Twain, the artist Frederic Remington, and the heavyweight boxing champion Gentleman Jim Corbett.

[After Fairbanks enrolled at the Jesuit-run Seton College, his mother died young of cancer and he left New York. He sailed with his uncle for Havana, hit a hurricane and ended up in Veracruz, disenchanted with seafaring. He joined a trail herd heading north for Texas, had adventures with the mistress of a Mexican General and went to Butte Montana with a trainload of horses. Losing at poker, he became an undertaker's assistant, then worked as assistant and chief anesthetist to a doctor. He went back to Texas where he broke horses for the US Cavalry. He got hired to ride a horse in the play *The Clansman* (later adapted by D.W. Griffith as *Birth of a Nation*). He decided to try New York theatrical agencies and alternated stage and movie acting.

He adopted the more exotic “Raoul” in place of his given names and later claimed it was his baptismal name.

His riding skill got him noticed by Griffith who put him in films with Mary Pickford, the Gish sisters, Blanche Sweet, and Lionel Barrymore. He went with Griffith from Biograph to join Mutual in California. He worked as assistant director to Griffith and said “I admired everything he did....He really was a master to me.”]

His first independent assignment came when, on the strength of his knowledge of Mexico, he was sent to El Paso to shoot scenes for a film about Pancho Villa with—it was hoped—the General himself playing the lead. Through a shrewd combination of bribery and flattery, Walsh secured Villa’s cooperation, even persuading him to restage the battle of Durango for the camera’s benefit, and took part in a triumphal entry into Mexico City. To Walsh’s footage were added some highly romanticized episodes (directed by Cabanne) from the life of the young Villa (played by Walsh) to complete *The Life of General Villa* (1914).

Walsh returned from Mexico with a suitcase full of pesos given him by the grateful Villa (they turned out to be worthless) in time to act as assistant director on Griffith’s Civil War epic, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), handling most of the battle sequences. “Mr Walsh,” observed Griffith, “if you had been a Confederate general, the South would never have lost the war. Walsh was now judged ready to direct films of his own and was assigned to a string of two-reelers. These were the usual cheerfully eclectic mixture of the period—mainly Westerns, comedies, and melodramas. He attacked them all with lively enthusiasm, often playing lead roles and, most likely, scripting as well....

Walsh’s direction had already attracted some favorable reviews, as well as the attention of other film companies. In June 1915 he was offered a job by Winfred Sheehan of the newly found Fox studio in New York, at the then munificent salary of \$400 a week. Walsh would work for Fox, on and off, for the next twenty years; his first picture for the company was *The Regeneration* (1915), which may well be also the first feature-length gangster film ever made. One scene called for a crowded riverboat on the Hudson to catch fire: Walsh shot it with such realism that three fireboats and a police launch showed up, and the rising young director was hauled off to the station house....

Opinions of Walsh’s early films have to be taken on trust, since few of them have survived. Among those missing is *The Honor System* (1917), which John Ford once named as one of the ten best movies he had ever seen....

Perhaps the finest of his silent period and, in the opinion of some critics the best film he ever directed, *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), was made for Douglas Fairbanks Pictures, and remains (wrote Julian Fox in *Films and Filming*, June 1973) “probably the most truly magical

entertainment of the silent era.” Fairbanks took the title role and (as “Elton John”) wrote the story, loosely derived from *The Thousand and One Nights*. The film deployed a dazzling battery of special effects, several of them purloined from Fritz Lang’s *Der Müde Tod*, to which Fairbanks held the US rights, and whose release he delayed until after his own film had appeared. *The Thief* conveys an infectious sense of delight in its own visual wizardry. Fairbanks, at the height of his athletic prowess, gracefully swashbuckles his way through a fairytale plot of monsters, marvels, exotic villains, flying carpets, winged horses, mermaids, and dragons before finally rescuing the beautiful princess whom he loves. William Cameron Menzies’ sets, luminously photographed by Arthur Edson, created a fantastical world whose structures, as a studio handout put it, seemed to be “hanging from the clouds rather than...set firmly upon earth.”

Walsh enjoyed switching “from the rough stuff I’d been doing to this dreamy kind of epic,” and he got on well with Fairbanks, whose dynamic acting style accorded perfectly with his own energetic approach to filmmaking. *The Thief of Bagdad*, which cost a million dollars, was shot in only thirty-five days. Walsh intended it to be “the best picture I had ever directed. And was gratified by the reviews, even if inevitably Fairbanks attracted most of the attention. “Here is magic, here is beauty,” enthused *Photoplay*. “Here is all the colour and phantasy of the greatest works of imaginative literature.” Other views called it “the greatest conjuring trick ever performed” and “a feat of motion picture art which will never be equalled.” Sixty years later, at the 1984 London Film Festival, the film was re-released in a fresh print with live musical accompaniment and proved to have lost little of its appeal.

[Walsh’s other successes include *What Price Glory* (1926), *Sadie Thompson* (1928)]

Reacting with characteristic insouciance to the coming of sound, Walsh commandeered a Fox Movietone van and set off for Utah to shoot the first Western talkie on location. *In Old Arizona* (1929), based on an O. Henry story, was to have been only two reels, but when the Fox executives saw the rushes they asked for five. In the leading role of the Cisco Kid, Walsh cast himself, complete with Pancho Villa moustache and accent to match. The film was nearly finished when the sound van broke down, and it was decided to go home and shoot the final scenes on the Fox back lot. The company drove back through the desert at night, with Walsh riding in the first car. A startled jackrabbit jumped straight through the windshield, hitting him in the face and cutting him badly. He was rushed to the hospital in Salt Lake City, but his right eye was beyond saving. Rejecting the offer of a glass substitute (“No, I’d get drunk and lose it”), Walsh adopted a black eye patch, which he wore thereafter with buccaneering panache. ...

The films Walsh directed in the 1930s, prior to joining Warners at the end of the decade, represent on the whole a low point in his creative output. With his very first

film for Warner, *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), Walsh recouped his reputation, creating a box-office smash and a key masterpiece of the gangster genre. ...

Both Walsh and Lupino were luckier [than in *They Drive By Night* (1940)] with *High Sierra* (1941), which inaugurated a new style of gangster movie. Where the hoods of the 1930s had been young, dynamic, ambitious, reveling in their sharp suits and newly acquired power, their counterparts in the 1940s were a breed of weary, disillusioned antiheroes, looking to pull “one last good job” before retiring. From the moment Roy Earle gets out of an Illinois jail and heads west, an unmistakable air of existential doom hangs over him—“just rushin’ towards death,” observes a fellow gangster, quoting Dillinger. *High Sierra*, as David Thompson noted, “is the first clear statement of the inevitable destruction of the self-sufficient outsider.”

The role of Earle had been intended for George Raft; when he ill-advisedly turned it down, it went instead to Bogart, who at last achieved star billing.... Apart from a maudlin subplot involving a crippled girl whose operation Earle finances, the film’s pace rarely slackens; Walsh drives relentlessly toward the inevitable showdown in the mountains, at one point throwing in an effortless 600-degree pan. (*High Sierra* also gave John Huston, who wrote the script from W.R. Burnett’s novel, a lift to the director’s chair for *The Maltese Falcon*.)

Nineteen forty-one was an exceptional year for Walsh. Besides *High Sierra*, he directed three more pictures, all good in their very different ways—*The Strawberry Blonde*, *Manpower*, *They Died With Their Boots On* (the first of seven he would make with Errol Flynn).

...Throughout his career, Walsh felt hampered and frustrated by the narrow constrictions of Hollywood censorship. “If we could be working today,” he remarked after his retirement, “the theaters would catch fire with the scenes we would put on. I’ve sometimes had a whole reel thrown out of a picture.” Another heavily mutilated work was *The Naked and the Dead* (1958), taken from Norman Mailer’s celebrated best-seller of the war in the Pacific. Except in France, where it was highly regarded (Michel Marmin referred to its “marvelous dramatic richness”), most critics saw the film version as a sadly bowdlerized and diminished version of the novel. Walsh concurred: “The censors cut out all the naked and left the dead.”

Walsh’s long career wound down in an assorted handful of minor films. . . .

The traditional assessment of Raoul Walsh casts him as an ultra-professional studio workhorse, a supreme director of fast-paced outdoor action movies filmed with a robust lack of pretension—one of the greatest primitives of the screen,” in Ephraim Katz’s words. As such, he has often been compared with such directors as Ford and Hawks, slightly to his detriment. In Andrew Sarris’s

formulation: “If the heroes of Ford are sustained by tradition, and the heroes of Hawks by professionalism, the heroes of Walsh are sustained by nothing more than a feeling for adventure, The Fordian hero knows why he is doing something even if he doesn’t know how. The Hawksian hero knows how to do what he is doing even if he doesn’t know why. The Walshian hero is less interested in the why or the how than in the what. He is always plunging into the unknown, and he is never too sure what he will find there.”... Walsh himself never gave such speculation any encouragement: “I just did my job. I let others make up the theories.” His views on directorial technique were equally terse: “Action, action, action....Let the screen be filled ceaselessly with events. Logical things in a logical sequence. That’s always been my rule—a rule I’ve never had to change.”

During most of his career Walsh rarely attracted “serious” critical notice, but toward the end of the 1950s he was discovered and taken up in a France as a great neglected master.... The 1970s saw several major retrospectives of Walsh’s work, including one at the Edinburgh Festival and another the same year at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the latter lasting three months and comprising sixty-seven movies.

From Schickel on Film. Richard Schickel. Wm Morris Co NY 1989 “Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. ‘By the Clock’”

To see him at work—even now, sixty, seventy years since his finest films, almost a half century since his premature death—is to sense, as if for the first time, the full possibilities of a certain kind of movement in the movies. The stunts have been imitated and parodied, and so has the screen personality, which was an improbable combination of the laughing cavalier and the dashing democrat. But no one has quite recaptured the freshness, the sense of perpetually innocent, perpetually adolescent narcissism that Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., brought to the screen. There was, of course, an element of the show-off in what he did. But it was (and still remains) deliciously palatable because he managed to communicate a feeling that he was as amazed and delighted as his audience by what that miraculous machine, his body, could accomplish when he launched it into trajectory to rescue the maiden fair, humiliate the villain, or escape the blundering soldiery that fruitlessly pursued him, in different uniforms but with consistent clumsiness, through a dozen pictures.

Watching him—and contemplating his ever-diminishing repute—one feels that somehow we have lost the knack, not to mention the spirit, for what he did and that the loss is permanent. Undoubtedly there are many people around to equal, even to surpass Fairbanks’s athletic gift. But there are none, one sadly imagines, who could or would orchestrate that gift as he did, creating out of a series of runs, jumps, leaps, vaults, climbs, swings, handsprings, and somersaults those miraculously long, marvelously

melodic lines of movement through which he flung himself with such heedless grace. The problem is that even among acting's most youthful spirits there is no disposition to see their aim as simply taking joy from the job and giving it back—enhanced to the audience. For since the end of World War II, actors have grown distressingly sober about their mission in life. If they are not engaged in agonizing debate about the theory of their art, they are devoting their celebrity prestige to good causes of every kind. It is the same with the popular genre films in which they appear. Comedy is now generally a much more inward, self-consciously psychological matter than it formerly was—“post-funny,” Richard Corliss has memorably called it. Romance is tormented in analogous ways, and action is devoid of the elegant wit and grace with which Fairbanks imbued it. It is all rending metal, explosive charges, and glum hunks like Sly Stallone, who might be better off in silent pictures, where the subtitles, at least, could supply the literacy they cannot handle.

Fairbanks, of course, was the product and exemplar of an age that if not quite so innocent as we like to suppose, was nevertheless not quite so grand in its artistic aspirations—especially in the movies, which only a few zealots then imagined as an art form—as we have become. There is no evidence that Douglas Fairbanks conceived of himself as anything more than a fabulist and a fantasist. The idea that he might have held a mirror up to life would probably have appalled him. What he did was hold a mirror up to himself—to endlessly boyish Doug—and invite his audience to join him in pleased contemplation of the image he found there, an image that very accurately reflected a shallow, callow, charming man who lived by the simplest of American codes and eventually died by it.

It is fair to say that of the great silent-screen stars, Fairbanks probably expressed more of his true self on-screen than anyone. Mary Pickford, with whom he was to contract Hollywood's first royal marriage, had created, of course, the classic American girl—spunky, virginal, with a beauty bathed in perpetual golden sunlight. But she was, in fact, a tough, shrewd woman, and it would appear that her character began as a fantasy shared by her mother (the archetypal stage mom) and her first film director, D.W. Griffith. Certainly her golden girl image was sustained more by the demands of commerce than by the demands of artistic conscience. Chaplin's *Little Fellow* was a more complicated construct and represented a part of his complex nature—but only a part of it. William S. Hart, the first great Western good-bad man, came in time to identify strongly with his screen character; but his real-life western experience was limited, and before the movies found him, he had been an actor in stage melodramas (notably *Ben-Her*) that had precious little to do with frontier days in the United States. As for vamps and other exotic sex symbols, from Theda Bara to Rudolph Valentino, they were mostly the offspring of the fevered imaginings of producers and

publicists and, more often than not, desperate and, ultimately, despairing in their efforts to disguise the gap between fantasy's finery and reality's frumpiness.

But Fairbanks was always—triumphantly, irritatingly, ingratiatingly—Fairbanks, both on the screen and away from it. In fact, there is about his career a certain inevitability; one can't quite imagine what he would have done with himself if the movies had not come into existence and provided him with precisely the kind of showcase his spirit and talents required. Many of his peers might have been just as successful (if not quite so wildly prosperous) as stage personalities. But there was no stage that could contain Fairbanks's energy or permit him to fully exploit his natural gifts. Indeed, even the screen could not entirely absorb him.

Therein lies his modest tragedy. For it is as the founder of the most imitable of the life-styles of the rich and famous—the high Hollywood manner, the great house, the breathlessly reported travels, the friends from all walks of celebrity life—that he is recalled (if at all) by later generations. His films, which capture the best of the man, his sweet cheekiness and easy grace, are scarcely seen at all now. And his quite successful efforts to expand the expressive range of the screen—he virtually invented the most delicious form of spectacle, the humorously romantic form, which in his time stood (or rather floated) in such delightful contrast with the humorless galumphings of De Mille and Griffith—go unremarked, except possibly by George Lucas. So great was his fame in the last decades of his life and so affectionate was the regard in which millions held him that this latter-day neglect would surely have sobered, if not completely shocked, this perpetual optimist. Or then again it might not have. For he did outlive his gift which was entirely bound up with the illusion of perpetual youth, perpetual energy, and he did die before his time in a state of puzzlement over where the magic had gone.

...The point was to set up a situation where the true Fairbanks—resourceful, daring, gallant—could emerge from an improbable cocoon and gaily, dartingly demonstrate his remarkable heroic gifts. In that very first Loos-Emerson film, for example, he boxed six rounds with a professional fighter, dived from the deck of an ocean liner into the sea, and took a mighty leap from a speeding train. In subsequent films he was to be observed fighting forest fires, climbing the sheer walls of canyons, being a “human submarine.”



Of course, there was more to the popularity of these cheerful little dramas than good humor and great stunting. These transformations of his from spectacular ineptitude to even more spectacular eptitude generally signalled an implicit conversion of another sort—to “Americanism,” for want of a better word. That is to say, he set aside vaguely foreign or effeminate ways (they were really the same thing as far as most males of the time were concerned) and faced his troubles forthrightly but with quick, improvisatory cleverness. The time was ripe for such a figure, and Fairbanks’s rise to fame coincided with a great popular interest in the application of those virtues to world problems. In 1916, the year he made ten films—a quarter of his lifetime’s production—America was standing ambivalently aloof from the Great War in Europe, and there was a major debate over whether the nation as a whole should undertake a transformation not unlike the one Fairbanks repeatedly undertook. Ultimately, of course, it did—with results far more ambiguous than those he so happily achieved.

But even if the war had not been going on, Fairbanks would have had a fundamental appeal to his audiences. A room, as Cooke so nicely put it, was for him “a machine for escape,” and to see Doug at bay and fighting off his enemies, the while casing the place for possibilities (this staircase here, that balcony there, and how about these fools), was always the moment of highest deliciousness in his work. The potentialities were always apparent to the audience but not the sequence of their employment, not the variations he could ring on simple action. (Who else would have thought of, let alone dared, a handspring powered and supported by only one arm?) Lightning pragmatism, that was the heart of his style, and to combine pragmatism—America’s only contribution to world philosophy—with instant action—our national obsession—was no trivial invention.

Its appeal abides, perhaps better than the relentless optimism of Fairbanks’s nature. He was a man who in adulthood naturally looked on the bright side of things, but the books he wrote (or had ghosted) were a bit too much.

Laugh and Live. Making Life Worthwhile, Whistle and Hoe—Sing as We Go (to name less than half his literary output) set the teeth on edge. Yet one must admit that at this time he had better reason than almost anyone else to believe that anything was possible for a plucky, lucky young man, for by 1920 he had achieved not merely wealth but (because he was the first to recognize consciously the celebrity power the film medium could confer on its chosen few) also the social position and influence on the world of affairs—beyond the dreams of any previous actor.

Robert Sherwood *The Silent Drama “The Thief of Bagdad”*

After seeing *The Thief of Bagdad*, I am more competent to understand the motives which inspired the sturdy Britons who have been struggling for years to reach the peak of Mount Everest. I now know what it means to be able to say, “Well, I’ve been to the top.”. . . There may well be higher peaks than that achieved by *The Thief of Bagdad*—but if there are, they have not as yet been charted on any of the existent contour maps.

The Thief of Bagdad is the farthest and sudden advance that the movie has ever made and, at the same time, it is a return to the form of the earliest presentable films....

Fairbanks has not been afraid to resort to magic of the most flagrant variety. ...he has performed the superhuman feat of making his magic seem probable.

When, in *The Ten Commandments*, Cecil B. De Mille caused the Red Sea to part, every one remarked, “That’s a great trick. How did he do it?” There are no such mental interruptions for the spectator in *The Thief of Bagdad*. He watches Fairbanks’ phenomenal stunts without stopping to think of them as tricks. He accepts them as facts. ...

One derives from *The Thief of Bagdad* the same childish thrill that is furnished by a first perusal of Hans Andersen’s stories. It is enthrallingly romantic, inspiringly unreal.

If anyone can see this marvelous picture and still choose to sneer at the movies, I shall be glad to escort him to Hollywood and feed him to the largest dragon in the Fairbanks menagerie.

Who The Devil Made It? Peter Bogdanovitch. Ballantine Books NY 1997

How did The Thief of Bagdad [1924] come about?

Doug Fairbanks sent for me—we used to fraternize. Doug was great at badminton. So he got me in there as a partner and he said, “Raoul, I want you to direct a picture for me.” We got an idea and we started working on it and we made the picture.

What do you think of that picture?

I liked it.

A lot of trick work in it.

You mean the flying carpet and all that stuff? Well, I got the fellas together from the Keystone Comedy lot because they did a lot of wire stuff and different things and set them up at the studio. ...

You shot for a long time on Thief of Bagdad.

Yes, well, Doug used to take a long time, and of course he took a long time in preproduction doing stunts on those trampolines.

According to Fritz Lang. He had made a movie in Germany called Destiny [1921] with a lot of trick effects done on the set, and he says Fairbanks bought that film and copied all the tricks for Thief of Bagdad.

I never heard that. Doug wouldn't go for it, I don't think, because he never wanted to do *anything* that was already made—he always wanted to originate.

Warner Brothers Directors The Hard Boiled, The Comic and the Weepers. Arlington House Publishers. New Rochelle NY 1978

In 1924 Walsh became associated with his first agent, Harry Wurtzel. Within a week, Wurtzel arranged to have the director film a Douglas Fairbanks spectacle at United Artists called *The Thief of Bagdad*, Fairbanks escorted Walsh around the sets of the director's first million dollar

Coming up in Buffalo Film Seminars XIII, Fall 2006:

Sept 5 Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, **King Kong** 1933
Sept 12 Michael Curtiz **Mildred Pierce** 1945
Sept 26 Howard Hawks **The Big Sleep** 1946
Oct 3 Satyajit Ray, **Aparajito/The Unvanquished** 1956
Oct 10 Jean-Pierre Melville **Le Samourai** 1967
Oct 17 Roman Polanski **Chinatown** 1974
Oct 24 Robert Altman **M*A*S*H** 1970
Oct 31 Fred Zinnemann, **The Day of the Jackal** 1973
Nov 7 Emile de Antonio **In the Year of the Pig** 1969
Nov 14 Bob Rafelson, **Five Easy Pieces** 1970
Nov 21 Nicolas Roeg **The Man Who Fell to Earth** 1976
Nov 28 Spike Lee **Do the Right Thing** 1989
Dec 5 Peter Greenaway **Prospero's Books** 1991

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...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

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production, lavishly designed by William Cameron Menzies.

Of course Fairbanks essayed the title role, and he even wrote the script under a pseudonym....

The Thief of Bagdad was shot in thirty-five days. Among the distinguished visitors to the set were Charlie Chaplin, John Barrymore, John Gilbert, and Billy Tilden, and the director with the heavy production costs often had trouble keeping the playful celebrities out of camera range....

Debuting at the Liberty Theatre in New York City, *The Thief of Bagdad* cost three dollars per ticket. The opening night moviegoer was treated to a speech by Fairbanks, and the star and director then took center stage to bow to the fans' standing ovation.

Critics cheered the loudest. "The danger in writing about *The Thief of Bagdad* is in too great use of superlatives," cautioned *Cinema Art* magazine. "Yet this new production of Douglas Fairbanks is such a marvelous creation and is so unlike any other offering of the screen that the reviewer is justified in ecstasies. Raoul Walsh directed and to him must go a big portion of the honours." According to the *Boston American*, *The Thief of Bagdad* "cannot be described in words—it must be seen," Imagine a clever satire on *Arabian Nights*," wrote the *New York Times* critic, "with marvelous photography, and you have an inkling of...*The Thief of Bagdad*."



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