



Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca--Bogart, Bergman, and World War II

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It is 50 years since "Casablanca" opened up in America. Little did Humphrey Bogart know when he uttered the final line - "This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship" - that he had just closed what would be one of the most enduring and popular movies ever. Aljean Harmetz believes that "every movie is a creature built from accidents and blind choices - a mechanical monster constructed of camera angles, the chemistry between actors, too little money or too much and a thousand unintended moments." Her portrait of the making of an unmatched classic reveals some of the accidents: how the stars of the movie almost weren't Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman; how "As Time Goes By" nearly didn't make it to the final cut.

Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca--Bogart, Bergman, and World War II Details

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From Reader Review Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca--Bogart, Bergman, and World War II for online ebook

Dawn says

Well researched, lots of good pictures. A little too concentrated on writers and pre-pre-pre-production.

Blaine Welgraven says

The best book on Casablanca's development from script-to-screen, bar none. Usual Suspects is certainly an exquisite chronology of the events surrounding Casablanca's steady, fortuitous development, but supersedes and distinguishes itself from other contemporary works by bringing thorough contextualization to the now legendary film (including a total integration/discussion of the role the film's studio system production and World War II social setting played in shaping the final product). In particular, Harmetz's use of Warner Brother's studio production notes gives her work a rich primary source that her predecessors lacked (leading to unnecessary speculation on the film's ending), primary sources that decidedly settle many of the unnecessary myths surrounding Casablanca's rather typical production. As Harmetz acutely emphasizes, no one saw Casablanca as being anything but ordinary in its day--it was just another Hollywood production. Now, it's considered perhaps the greatest movie of all time--the ultimate testimony to the effectiveness of the studio era. A must read for anyone seeking to understand the film industry at the apex of World War II patriotism, FDR's New-Dealism, and Hollywood's studio system.

David says

For many years, if asked, I would claim my favorite movie of all time was "The Godfather" but lately I'm not so sure. I find "Casablanca" so compellingly watchable that any time I run across it on television I can't pull myself away. I think if at this point of my life I had to pick a single desert island movie, it would be "Casablanca". It's as near to a perfect movie as can be. It's full of humor, romance, and suspense. It has some of the most memorable lines in movie history, and it has the perfect ending - the cynical hero performing a selfless act for the greater good. He gives up the girl, and his cynicism, to rejoin the fight. And, of course, it has Bogart, my favorite actor this side of Cary Grant, and Ingrid Bergman, the most radiantly beautiful actress ever. She exuded both innocence and sensuality at the same time. She had a perfect face and a perfect voice. When she is on the screen it's impossible to take your eyes off her.

"The Making of Casablanca" is chock full of interesting nuggets. Ingrid Bergman would apparently fall in love with many of her on-screen lovers during filming (though interestingly Bogart was not one of them.) The book claims she had over a dozen affairs with her costars or her directors. But her love only lasted until the filming was complete:

"[S:]he was happiest when the emotions she was feeling on screen could spill over into real life. Bergman's first husband, Petter Lindstrom, told a biographer that his wife worked best when she was in love with her costar or her director. Whether the love was chaste or carnal, it never lasted beyond the last scene. Of his affair with Bergman on Saratoga Trunk, a bemused Gary Cooper told one journalist, 'In my whole life I never had a woman in love with me as Ingrid was. The day after the picture ended, I couldn't get her on the

phone."

That story made me laugh out loud. The book contains dozens of other interesting and amusing stories about the making of the movie, the studio system and its workings, the actors and their off-screen personalities and peculiarities. Bogart, for instance, was extremely difficult to get to know. While not a prima donna, he was a loner who would retreat to his trailer once a scene was complete. Bergman summed it up: "I kissed him, but I never knew him."

At any rate, if you love the movie this book will entertain you. If you don't love the movie, well, what's wrong with you?

Kathy says

If what you want is an exhaustingly researched book that belabors every single point, that explores the complete lives of everyone involved from Studio bigwigs to bit players to technical staff, that gets side tracked multiple times, then this is the book for you.

I admire the work that Harnetz did but it wasn't what I was looking for when I purchased the book. I was hoping for a nice lucid discussion on the making of Casablanca. I really got more than I bargained for. Several major problems as far as I was concerned. Harnetz did not follow a chronological order. Rather each chapter was devoted to a different topic. As a result, the Epstein brothers are writing hard on the script in chapter 2 but haven't even started in chapter 6. There are several chapters that could have been left out completely----for example one details the HUAC hearing in Washington that took place in the late 40's. Casablanca was made in 43. Another details discussions of a 1992 Harvard drama class analyzing the movie What did they have to do with "the Making" of the movie?

Also she drops every little tidbit of gossip about the Hollywood of the time of the movie. For example, what did these facts have to do with the situation: Van Johnson became a star at MGM because he was 4-F; Errol Flynn sneaked behind the scenery at least four times in everyone of his movies taking a willing starlet with him; oh and Dennis Morgan loved his part in God is my Co-Pilot

I could go on and on. There was just TOO MUCH in the book. I found the story I wanted but more than half the book was above and beyond that.

Mich says

This book is a wonderfully detailed account of the making of Casablanca by Aljean Harnetz. Taking the play, "Everybody Comes to Rick's", it wound up on the desk of Hal Wallis, the producer. It earned Oscars for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay. The assemblage of the actors, Bergman, Bogart, Raines, Henreid, Lorre, and Greenstreet along with the rewrite by the Epstein brothers and Howard Koch and the direction of Mike Curtiz was masterful. A few wonderful surprises - the piano player, Dooley Wilson sang but the actual playing was dubbed in, since he was only a drummer. The insertion of the song, As Time Goes By by Herman Hupfeld which was written for a 1931 Broadway show was selected by Max Steiner despite his reservations, principally because the music was inserted after the movie was shot and Ingrid Bergman had already had her hair cut short for another movie and couldn't reshoot scenes with another song. The most imposing presence through the book is Jack Warner with his micro management and autocratic review of every part of the film. Of course, if the movie would not have been great, no one would care about the inside

story.

Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaidides says

This did a very good job of explaining the climate in which *Casablanca* was made: the studio system, the effects of the war on available labor, the Hayes Code, the HUAC hearings. There was also a lot of detailed research on how *Casablanca* was made. I think it will enhance my understanding of and appreciation for the movie. What I felt was missing, though, was an exploration of whether the movie was a faithful depiction of life in *Casablanca* during this time.

There was also a bunch of material that felt somewhat extraneous — lots of time devoted to what happened to the various actors and other personnel who appeared in *Casablanca* after the film. Plus, I could really have done without the various scholarly interpretations of the film. (Why do people take Freudian/Oedipal criticism seriously. Why.)

Ed Mckeon says

On the 75th anniversary of its release, I went back and read the book written to celebrate the 50th anniversary. Like many, I've been a fan of *Casablanca* from the first viewing (though I realized that the first Bogart film I saw was the *Caine Mutiny*). Harnetz does a great job revealing production details, stories about the director, producer, stars, writers and studio, and recounting the milieu (World War II, the studio system, refugee immigration). Harnetz lets us see that *Casablanca* was a film where the stars (pun intended) aligned - Warner, Wallis, Bogart, Bergman, Koch and the Epsteins. It's a film that has become legendary despite the fact that the final lines were crafted after principal shooting was complete. I look forward to an evening soon when I can sit down and watch the magic happen again with a more complete knowledge of how that magic was made.

Andy says

4.5 stars - Excellent look at the planning, making, and cultural impact of a classic film. Harnetz goes into great detail about how the film was adapted from a play called *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, how the screenplay was written (by seven different writers) and all of the "happy accidents" that made *Casablanca* happen.

The entire film really *was* a happy accident, although it wasn't so happy for everyone involved. Ingrid Bergman was in the midst of an unhappy marriage; the film drove an enormous rift between studio head Jack Warner and producer Hal Wallis; "As Time Goes By" almost went goodbye; and the ending... Well, you'll have to read the book for that. Yet the most fascinating aspects of the book have to do with how World War II affected the film, giving us a movie that - without the war - we probably wouldn't be talking about today, at least not in the same way. Highly recommended.

Richard says

While this book is primarily the story about how *Casablanca*, that most classic of classic movies, was made, it's also a look at how the studio system worked in the 1940s and about how the film industry was affected by World War II during the years that the war was raging. If, like me, you find this kind of stuff interesting, then you won't mind the chapters where the book diverges from its main topic.

The book details the process of making a movie, including writing, casting, scheduling, and budgeting. Author Aljean Harmetz does a nice job of describing how filmmakers had to deal with censors, how the Production Code often forced them to find a coy way to get their point across. I especially liked how a fade out after a kiss would have implied that Rick and Ilsa had had sex, but a dissolve would imply that immediately after the kiss they stood up and headed for the train station. It seems nitpicky, but I kind of get it.

There's also plenty of biographical information about Jack Warner, director Michael Curtiz, producer Hal Wallis, writers Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch, plus the cast. I already knew quite a bit about Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, but it was fun getting some more background about the rest of the cast, including such very familiar faces as Claude Rains and Peter Lorre. (I had no idea, for example, that Rains was a Pennsylvania farmer.)

Harmetz also provides some interesting ruminations about the roles of character actors in the films of the era. Part of the fun (for me at least) of watching these classic films is seeing the familiar supporting actors in movie after movie. I can list a bunch of them: Henry Travers, C. Aubrey Smith, Eugene Pallette, Una O'Connor, Louise Beavers, Donald Meek, Porter Hall, Thelma Ritter, and many more. You don't get that in the movies anymore; the familiar character actor who pops up everywhere has become more of a television thing: Think of such modern-day examples like Jere Burns, Currie Graham, Margo Martindale, Zeljko Ivanek, Donal Logue, and Frances Conroy. The discussion of character actors in Chapter 8 had me thinking about various individuals, and they way they contribute to film (or television) for several days.

Kate says

Fascinating and enjoyable book about-- as the title says-- the making of "Casablanca."

In addition to telling about the performers in the film, it's a vivid insight into its creators and into the studio system of the 1940's AND into the effects of WWII on moviemaking.

I especially enjoyed learning about the backgrounds of the bit players, many of whom were European refugees. It warmed my heart to know that there were real tears on the set when Victor Laszlo leads the denizens of Rick's Cafe in the singing of the Marseillaise. (That scene always makes me teary-eyed, no matter how many times I see it. Now I know why!)

Mike says

I've read this book before - or at least most of it. It concerns the making of *Casablanca*, a film that has now

become a classic but was at first considered to be just one of the many movies Warner Brothers' factory-like studio turned out by the month in its heyday.

Harmetz has done an enormous amount of research, and it shows. Sometimes there's too much of it for the reader to take in, and some of it, particularly as the book comes to a close, just makes the cake top heavy, but it's a fascinating book full of comments and insights from many of the people who were involved in the movie.

The movie was made at an opportune time: the real Casablanca was in the news shortly after the film's completion, which helped it to sell well. And intriguingly, many of the bit players were not only playing refugees, but *were* refugees from Germany and other countries under threat. Some would go on to have reasonable careers in the States; others, even though they'd been major stars in their own countries, never managed to make the big time in the New World.

Kinga says

A very enjoyable and complete book about Casablanca. Sometimes, however, it bored me with so many figures and Chapter 17 was really the lowest part of it. At first, i thought that to contrast everything was a good idea, but later on i found it excessive. What is more, it surprised me that being a well-searched book the writer contrast Bergman's autobiography only with the one Laurence Leamer wrote naming him 'her' biographer while there were other books on her - less subjective. It really bothered me.

Overall, i enjoyed the book and it gives a very good insight to the way how the studio system worked. Also, it provided me with a lot new info about not only the movie but its creators as well. Now, i would like to visit some of the archives just to see some of the docs personally.

I recommend it to everyone who loves Golden Hollywood and wish to know more about that era. It is written the way that a normal person with no previous movie-studies can understand it perfectly.

Kate says

This is "richly detailed, compelling as a suspense novel" according to the blurb on the back cover of the edition I read.

I don't know about the suspense novel comparison, and I don't know that suspense is even something I look for in this type of book, but it's definitely a detailed book. The amount of research that went into it is obvious. I also don't know how apt the subtitle is, but "World War 2 and the Hollywood Studio System" isn't very catchy. My point is that this book is a little less about Bogart and Bergman than it is about how the studio system shaped Casablanca and how WW2 shaped the movie industry.

Reading this 24 years after its publication, it does seem dated at times, and there was a paragraph of 90s references that went straight over my head. But it's not completely clouded by the rose-tinted glasses people sometimes see Old Hollywood through. Aljean Harmetz does address the racism, sexism, and antisemitism omnipresent in the story. That's not the focus of the book, but it seems like a good starting point to learning more.

The chapter about the role of refugees in the making of *Casablanca* was the most worthwhile for me in terms of adding a new level of understanding and appreciation for the movie. If you can find a copy of this book, I think it's a worthwhile read for that chapter alone. I also appreciated that the stories of so many members of the cast and crew were given equal billing with those of the stars.

Recommended for people who listen to the *You Must Remember This* podcast, especially if you enjoyed the series on the blacklist or the series on Hollywood during WW2.

Claire says

Absolutely fascinating. Harmetz beautifully contextualizes the making of this all-time classic movie within the studio system and the wider political situation of the era, and neatly explodes some of the myths that have grown up around 'Casablanca'. Anyone who loves Bogart, Bergman, classic Hollywood or modern American history will find something of interest in this very readable and well-researched book.

Evan says

To say that *Casablanca* was the product of a series of happy accidents, which is the traditional assertion (usually underscored by such dire trivial tidbits as the possibility that George Raft or Ronald Reagan and Ann Sheridan *might* have starred in it instead of Bogie and Bergman)--is pretty misleading. It's true that any number of mediocre creations of culture *might* have been better under different circumstances. And it's just as true that many of the great things we admire might have been mediocre given different happenstance.

We only care about those seemingly "accidental" choices when they result in something above the ordinary. But choices are not accidents, and the way *Casablanca* got made was the way a lot of pictures got made in the Hollywood factory studio system in the early 1940s--and at Warner Bros. in particular. As an example of the studio's product, it is not in many ways unusual, but because it has become one of the perennial crown jewels of the cinematic art, and because it taps into an almost indefinable, enigmatic romantic poetic essence and creates an almost universally moving *frisson*, the popular game becomes wondering what might have been: How something so wonderful might have been, on the turn of a dime here and there, so bland and forgotten.

The book rather early on puts to rest some of the myths surrounding the movie, but also verifies some of the legendary anecdotes that have become well known among film buffs. The movie was thought of as a Bogart vehicle fairly early in its life, and Ingrid Bergman was a leading choice for leading lady also close to its outset, which dispels one of the popular myths. Another myth the book challenges (one perpetuated for years by screenwriter Koch, who later profusely recanted and apologized for) was that the original play by Murray Burnett upon which the film was based ("Everybody Comes to Rick's") provided very little material that actually ended up in the finished film. In fact, a *lot* of the settings, dialogue, themes, plot elements, and characters from the play made it into the movie. One of the sad results of this myth is that Burnett and his writing partner, Joan Alison, have been overlooked in film history for the ample source material they provided for one of the greatest films ever made.

(In case you're wondering why I'm writing this review already, read on...)

I'm doing something I've rarely done here, and that is to write a review of a book that I haven't even come close to finishing. Part of this is because the inspiration hits me now (call it the "Casablanca Complex", if you will). Nonetheless, I feel safe in doing so, because this book is simply first-rate of its kind. The way the *Casablanca* script was honed by its team of writers (all working separately and each adding his own unique thematic and stylistic strengths)--all guided by the hand of the film's strong-willed producer, Hal Wallis--is related in finely researched and flavorful detail by author Aljean Harmetz. The portraits of the witty scriptwriting Epstein Brothers (who gave the film its delectable cynical humor) and their writer peer Howard Koch (who gave the film its political content), along with those of directors Michael Curtiz, producer Wallis, and the moguls Jack and Harry Warner, are vivid, and their interactions with one another in the making of the film fascinatingly related. Sharply rendered also is the profile of the living, breathing, cavernous entity known as the Warner Brothers studio. Harmetz understands what made the studio tick and why it became known as the populist movie brand of the working classes; how and why its movies were faster, rougher, and tougher than the more elegantly bred products of MGM and Fox and Paramount.

The book weaves its story assuredly within the greater context of the world war that informed the film's concerns, and how the film reflected propaganda needs and the mood of self sacrifice of its own times, as well as the qualities that lend the film its enduring romantic appeal.

Reading on...

Elisha Condie says

The Bogart biography led me to read this book about the making of Casablanca. It was very interesting! And also pretty long. It would have been perfect if they trimmed 100 pages or more out of it.

I loved learning about the personalities of all the actors on set. It particularly fleshed out even secondary characters like Claude Rains (Renault) and Paul Hendried (Lazlo). Also, the entire cast who occupy Rick's Cafe were made up of refugees from Europe. They were an international bunch. And the scene where they sing the French national anthem to drown out the Nazis singing really brought everyone to tears. It meant something! It was fascinating to hear how of all the war movies that came out during the 1940s this one is such a classic because all the stars aligned to provide the perfect writer, producer, actors, and historical context for the film.

Plus I love random bits of trivia about movies I love. The set designer was the well known architect who also designed the Brown Derby restaurants. The last scene with all the fog? It HAD to be foggy so that people couldn't see the plane in the back was a cardboard cut out. Little people were hired to act as mechanics around the plane to make it look farther away!

If you like Casablanca then this book would be worth reading. It really helps to understand the film and why its popularity has lasted so long. It's such a cool show. If you haven't watched it do so IMMEDIATELY.

Chris says

This is my favorite book I have read so far this year. I did not expect that. This book had a far larger scope

then I anticipated when I first picked it up. Casablanca is one of my favorite movies and I started this book hoping that it would give me a few bits of trivia about the movie, but what I got was a really interesting examination of the old Hollywood studio system, how the studios interacted with the military during the second world war, an examination of censorship during the war, a look at blacklisting and anti-communism in Hollywood, a sympathetic portrayal and tons of details about the lives of almost every person involved with the making of Casablanca.

Casablanca is an accidental masterpiece. So much of what makes the film great only happened by happenstance. For example, the film's music composer hated "As Time Goes Bye" and wanted to change it. Yet he couldn't because at the time a film wasn't scored until after filming was done and Ingrid Bergman had already had her hair cut short for her next role (For Whom the Bell Tolls) and couldn't do the re-shoots required to make it possible to change the them song. Only a few of the producers even thought they had a masterpiece on their hands when the film was finished. I could go on and on about how fascinating this book is. I really recommend it not only for someone who is a fan of Casablanca but for anyone interested in learning more about how Hollywood operated and films were made and the politics during the Second World War.

Roxton Malone says

This is a fascinating look, not only at the making of one of the greatest films ever made, but into the studio system of the 1930s and 40s and the way the U.S. government and the media worked throughout the Second World War. Part history, part biography, part film criticism, Harmetz comes at the story from all angles, and they all work. She did her homework and also includes plenty of firsthand interviews with just about everyone involved in the film who was still alive at the time of writing. I would have given it five stars but for the occasionally confusing writing style and the fact that she ends on such a cynical note after so many wonderful pages of marveling at the way this film came to be. Still, a highly recommended work of not just film history, but American history.

Joe says

A very interesting book in which Harmetz goes well beyond the trivial facts about the making of Casablanca. Harmetz does a great job of providing the context in which the movie was made. She includes chapters on the studio system, in which studios owned actors and everyone else involved in making a movie from directors to hairdressers. Studios also rented out their actors to other studios, at a profit, which is how Ingrid Bergman came to star in the movie.

Casablanca was made during a time when the United States was entering World War II (it started filming in June of 1942 and was in pre-production in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor) which had tremendous effect on the film industry. Studios were falling all over themselves to be patriotic, from selling war bonds to making propaganda films for the military to rationing film and other materials necessary to making a movie. It also meant that the government had say over the content of movies, objecting to scenes and dialogue that could be construed to show America as weak or American as not supporting the war effort. Harmetz covers the in-depth (perhaps too much so for my taste).

Harmetz also discusses the lives of the creators at length. We learn about Executive Producer Hal Wallis' feud with Jack Warner and penchant for writing stinging memos to his director, Michael Curtiz. We learn, in turn, about Curtiz' temper on set towards everyone except his stars, as well as a lot about Curtiz' career highs and lows, upbringing, journey to America, and love of horses.

My point here is that this book is much more than the gossip around Casablanca. There is a little of that, but the strength of the book lies in Harmetz' extensively researched account of the times and zeitgeist that helped create this beloved movie.

Robin says

This was a great behind-the-scenes book of the making of Casablanca. Discusses everyone and everything that had anything to do with the movie: actors, studio owners, costumes, how World War II affected the industry, etc. Terrific book, although not well known. If you're a fan of the movie, check it out!
