Adventure awaits with Alfred Hitchcockâ??s Foreign Correspondent

Description

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Foreign Correspondent (1940), part of TCMâ??s 31 Days of Oscar, is directed by Alfred Hitchcock and tells the story of a reporter caught up in an assassination of a Dutch Diplomat. Joel McRae (*Sullivanâ??s Travels*, *The Barbary Coast*) portrays John Jones in the filmâ??s lead. Jones is a news reporter who has garnered a reputation for himself by running down a payroll robbery while beating up a police officer â??in the line of duty.â?•

The film opens with a scrolling text dedicating the picture to the Foreign Correspondents, â??the intrepid ones who went across the seas to be the eyes and ears of America. To those forthright ones who early saw the clouds of war while many of us at home were seeing rainbowsâ?¦â?• Then, opens up to reveal a New York setting as the camera pulls out and then pushes in toward a window a dissolve

reveals a newsroom for the New York Globe.

A cable gram has come in from London dated August 13th, 1939, reading that no war is imminent due to bad crops. This gets the ire of the Globeâ??s head man, Mr. Powers, who has an instinct Europe is under great stress. He wants facts not a daily guess, â??a reporter who doesnâ??t know the difference between an ism and a kangaroo. A good honest crime reporter.â?• Powers is convinced a terrible crime is being committed in Europe when the light bulb goes on and Powers decides to send Jones, an â??ideal person to go to Europe.â?• Powers is hell-bent on getting news out of Europe not correspondence.

As the narrative moves forward, Jones has a myriad of experiences on a steamship, at London Station, and inside a bar, before meeting Van Meer. Van Meer is the Dutch ambassador who reportedly has a treaty clause that can keep the peace in Europe. Much like the narrative in Hitchcockâ??s *39 Steps* (1935), the clause becomes a McGuffin of considerable interest and moves forward the budding love romance between Jones, and Carol Fisher, portrayed by Laraine Day (*Those Endearing Young Charms* , *The Locket*). Carol Fisher is the daughter of Stephen Fisher, an international peace seeker. As with any Hitchcock film things arenâ??t always what they seem.

The pacing and spectacle, however, of *Foreign Correspondent* is vastly quicker and more extravagant than the *39 Steps*. In particular, a stunning scene in the Dutch countryside occurs in an area with three enormous windmills. A master of suspense, F*oreign Correspondent*â??s scene inside one of the windmills is one of Hitchâ??s best. The action coupled with non-diegetic music helps the scene to not only create suspense, but it also causes tension. Truthfully, the windmill scene is where the action takes off and doesnâ??t stop until the denouement. It is also at the beginning of Act 2 in the filmâ??s classical Hollywood three-act narrative.

Foreign Correspondent received six Oscar nominations in 1940 for Best Picture, Best Writing (Original Screenplay), Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Special Effects, and Best Actor in a Supporting Role. Having come to the United States from Great Britain at the onset of WWII, *Foreign Correspondent* was Hitchcockâ??s second film under the start of his US production. Interestingly, Hitchcockâ??s first American production, *Rebecca*, nominated for Best Picture alongside *Foreign Correspondent*, is the only film of his to win the Oscar for Best Picture. Nevertheless, *Foreign Correspondent* has tremendous spectacle, witty repartee, head-spinning plot twists, and it ends with a symbolic gesture that would make Donald Trump proud. Highly recommended.

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