

DISASTER

Storm, flood, earthquake, train wrecks, typhoon, shipwreck, fire, collapsing buildings and cannon's roar -- a series of movie catastrophes participated in by and sometimes survived by Errol Flynn, Laurence Olivier, Tyrone Power, Dolores Costello, Anita Stewart, Monte Blue, Norma Shearer, Irene Rich, Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable, Richard Dix, Buck Jones, Richard Arlen, Chester Morris, William Boyd, Earl Williams, Edward Arnold and Warner Oland.

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Any compiled program of this type inevitably represents some kind of compromise. So many of the best movie disasters are either unavailable (Fox's "The Johnstown Flood") or over-familiar through theatrical exhibition ("The Rains Came"). In other cases, outstanding examples like "Foreign Correspondent" (with its spectacular airliner crash climax) "Air Mail" (with some superb miniatures) and "The Michigan Kid" (a brilliant fire and shooting-the-rapids sequence) are films that we've run in their entirety quite recently. So we've tried to put together a program combining some familiar things with some unknown ones, spotlighting the often overlapping work of the 2nd Unit Directors and their stunt men, and the special effects men who help to create movie thrills through skilful miniatures and other trick effects.

With some twenty excerpts in a program of some three hours' duration, detailed notes on each film are obviously impractical. The following comments are therefore primarily for identification, and the compilation is arranged in the order as outlined.

### 1. General Chaos: Natural Origins

**FIRE WIND AND FLOOD:** Bob Youngson's cheerful roundup of outstanding scenes of holocaust and destruction. From the gleeful tone of the narration as hundreds are injured, killed, or made homeless, one suspects that Youngson may have struck some of the matches himself.

### 2. Collapsing Buildings: Natural, Human and Sub-human origins

**THE GOLEM:** A one-reel condensation of Julien Duvivier's 1937 reworking of the old legend. Contains all the spectacular highlights, though the narration pointedly avoids its racial significance.

**THE PHANTOM RIDER:** A brief moment from the climax of ep.2 of this 1935 Universal serial directed by Ray Taylor. Some really fine footage of a cattle stampede wrecking a town; most of it silent stock from (I believe) the 1926 "Flaming Frontier". Buck Jones is starred, and if you look closely you'll also notice his double, identically dressed, carelessly hanging around in crowd scenes not involving Buck.

**WRECKING CREW:** (Paramount, 1942) One of the better Pine-Thomas actioners, and one of the more elaborate, the fine photography of Fred Jackman jr. and the special effects of Alex Widloska make up for the wite scripting and Frank McDonald's routine direction. It's good "B" hoke with some well-dome thrills atop a collapsing sky-scraper. Richard Arlen, Chester Morris, Jean Parker.

**OLD SAN FRANCISCO:** (Warners, 1923) Dir: Alan Crosland. We ran Bob Youngson's condensation (one-reel) of this rich old melodrama once before, but it seems well worthy of a place on this program, and since we plan to run the whole film in November, it may even serve as a trailer too. Much over-written but excellently edited (especially in view of the complicated story-line), it stars Dolores Costello with Warner Oland, Anna May Wong, Sojin, Anders Randolph and Charles Emmet Mack.

### 3. Disaster (Various) At Sea

**LADY HAMILTON:** (UA, 1941) Dir: Alexander Korda. One of the most sumptuous productions ever (and inexplicably tepidly received -- except by Winston Churchill, whose favorite film it is) "Lady Hamilton" came to a close with a superbly done Battle of Trafalgar. The process work and the studio sets are lushly photographed by Rudy Mate, but the real star of the show is miniature wizard Edward Linden (who also did the miniature work on "King Kong".) The realism and conviction he attains is startling; this is what the amateurish and crude miniature sea-battle in "Ben Hur" should have looked like! With Laurence Olivier, Henry Wilcoxon.

YANKEE CLIPPER; (DeMille-Pathe, 1927) Dir: Rupert Julian. More good miniature work. You may recognise some of it as having been used again the same year in "Wreck of the Hesperus", which we showed a couple of months ago. William Boyd, Elinor Fair, John Miljan, Junior Coghlan.

TITANIC; (UFA, 1942) Some 8 reels of this 12 reel film were devoted to the sinking; this silent work-print reel (with Dutch and French subtitles) contains out-of-sequence excerpts from those eight reels. Justice is hardly done to the film as a whole, but it does convey an idea of its size and meticulous reconstruction. Made during the war, the film of course contained a lot of very subtle propaganda, extremely well put over. The Americans were lecherous and greedy, the British stubborn and ruthless, and the Jews cowardly and a nuisance. The Germans aboard were honest, courageous and disciplined -- but of course horribly exploited by the others! With Hans Nielsen, Sybille Schmitz, Theodore Loos, Otto Wernicke.

DANTE'S INFERNO (Fox, 1935) Dir: Harry Lachman. An odd feature with a real cornball plot and some great spectacle scenes. Rudy Mate, six years before the Battle of Trafalgar, here has a field-day. The minute the fire starts (and it devours the whole ship with a rather unlikely rapidity) his cameras tilt to 45 degrees. Then Yakima Canutt, Cliff Lyons and the stunt men rush in, and the fun is on. We've started the sequence a little early in order to include Rita Hayworth (under the name of Rita Cansino) in a beautifully photographed and edited dance number. Also included in the except is a secondary, minor, disaster when a carnival sideshow collapses. With Spencer Tracy, Claire Trevor, Alan Dinehart, Henry B. Walthall, Harry Woods.

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4. Train Wrecks

JUGGERNAUT (Vitagraph, 1915) Dir: Ralph Ince. Most 1915 films were overshadowed by "The Birth of a Nation" of course, but "Juggernaut" was one of the best of the runners-up, and this climactic reel gives a good example of the smooth camerawork (involving many travel shots) and excellent editing that it contained. The Brooklyn streets used in many scenes add nostalgic interest too. The wreck sequence is a thrilling spectacle and the real thing -- but note the obvious dummy for lovely Anita Stewart as she floats in the water. Why they didn't at least cut in fresh closeups is a mystery in this otherwise very professional and advanced film. With Anita Stewart, Earl Williams.

DIAMOND JIM (Universal, 1935) Dir: Edward Sutherland. Two wrecks for the price of one in this sequence. The first is mainly stock -- you've seen it before in "The Invisible Man" and others. The second is a whale of a sequence though, and looks as though D.W. himself shot it! With Edward Arnold, Jean Arthur.

5. Fires

LUCRETIA LOMBARD (Warner Bros., 1925) Dir: Jack Conway. Norma Shearer, Irene Rich and Monte Blue involved in a wonderful melange of forest fire, marauding wolves, an exploding dam, flood, and a wrecked bridge -- a sequence involving both the real thing and an elaborate miniature. It all looked much more convincing in the flaming red-tinted original (now too brittle to project) from which this rather pale dupe was made.

BOOM TOWN (MGM, 1940) Director Jack Conway still playing with matches! Lots of flames, but not too much detail. Universal and Warners had the best special effects departments; for such an important studio, MGM was surprisingly lax in this respect. Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy are involved in this oil-well fire.

6. Storms

SUEZ (Fox, 1938) Dir: Allan Dwan. Fox made some big, ponderous "prestige" specials in the late 30's and 40's. Most of them were pretty boring, but were usually redeemed by the excellence of their spectacle sequences and their special effects - as in "The Rains Came" and "In Old Chicago". "Suez" was ludicrous historically, but its spectacle was fine. Our excerpts show fine scenes of the building of the canal, an attack by raiders, and a super-scalds sirocco.

7. Battles

MAN OF CONQUEST (Republic, 1939) Dir: George Nicholls Jr. A well-made, accurate and certainly spectacular western, "Man of Conquest" is curiously forgotten -- yet infinitely superior in every respect to the recent "The Alamo". Its own Battle of the Alamo is mainly a matter of montage, since it was not a highlight sequence. (It also contains some mike boom shadows!) But the climactic Battle of San Jacinto is magnificently done -- staged by 2nd unit director Reaves Eason, photographed by Bill Hart's old reliable Joe August, and with Yakima Canutt recognisably taking at least half a dozen of the really spectacular horse falls. Richard Dix, Gail Patrick, C. Henry Gordon.

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE (Warners, 1936) Dir: Michael Curtiz. Still one of the best action spectacles ever filmed, with its mighty charge climax, staged by Reaves Eason, photographed by Fred Jackman and Sol Polito, and with Canutt again in the thick of things, rendered even more impressive thanks to some really dynamic editing and a stirring musical score. This kind of stuff will never be topped, and why Allied Artists are currently trying is very much of a mystery. The historical background in the film is somewhat shaky though, and amusingly it bears a striking resemblance to the San Jacinto battle in "Man of Conquest". Sam Houston's charge was to avenge Santa Ana's massacre of the Texans in the Alamo; Flynn charges to avenge a similar massacre by Surat Khan in India. To top things off, C. Henry Gordon is both Santa Ana and Surat Khan! (To prevent too many similarities though, Robert Barrat, who as Davy Crockett is massacred by Gordon in the Republic film, here turns up as Gordon's buddy! Unconcerned by it all is Yakima Canutt; all he knows is that he has to fall off those horses!)

8. Floods & The End of the World

"DELUGE" (Rko, 1933, dir: Felix Felst) had a wonderful sequence in which the world came to an end, and New York was shown being destroyed. The film seems to have been lost or destroyed too, but Republic have often used this particular sequence as stock, and the last chapter of a serial, KING OF THE ROCKET MEN used almost all of the big spectacle scenes. So ---

KING OF THE ROCKET MEN (Republic, 1949) Dir: Fred Bramson. Ep. 12.

Through the years, ray guns wielded by the villains allowed Republic to use extensive disaster shots in their serials. The Hindenburg was shot down by a ray gun in a Dick Tracy serial; the Tacoma Bridge ruined by another ray gun; and here a third ray gun - plus stock footage from DELUGE - brings about the destruction of New York. New York is really only tolerable when in the midst of some kind of crisis -- paralysed by snow-storms, strikes, power failures or subway fires. And it's never had a more interesting predicament than its superb destruction in these excellent miniatures. There's no last-minute rescue either, and the mayor blandly talks about building "a better New York" on the ruins of the old.

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POST SCRIPT: Because it's nicely topical right now, we've added to the very beginning of the program a short Edison 1900 newsreel item of the aftermath of the Galveston hurricane disaster. Not too much is shown, but it does have a certain historical interest. Also, during the evening, you'll see brief scenes of disaster from SAN FRANCISCO; LAST DAYS OF POMPEII; THE TEN COMMANDMENTS and THE HURRICANE, but not of sufficient length to warrant comment in these notes.

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Next show -- Tuesday next -- 7.30 -- Reuben Mamoulian's first film -- APPLAUSE - 1929 -- with Helen Morgan, Joan Peers, Fuller Mellish Jr. and Henry Wadsworth. Photographed by George Polsey.

Plus two early sound shorts -- "Jed's Vacation" with Charlie Chaplin, and "Open Spaces" with William Farnum, Antonio Moreno, Dorothy Sebastian, Ned Sparks, Walter Hiers, Robert Frazer.

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