

Review #46 : *The Spanish Main* (1945)

Paul Henreid and Maureen O'Hara

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQwBzNu0pEQ>



SYNOPSIS

Dutch Captain Laurent Van Horn (Paul Henreid of *Casablanca*) is a peaceful man on his way, along with other Dutch settlers, to the Carolinas when a hurricane blows their ship off course to Cartagena. Here they are imprisoned by the evil Viceroy, **Don Juan Alvarado** (Walter Slezak). Vowing vengeance, Laurent escapes along with some fellow prisoners.

Five years later, we learn that Laurent is now known as the chief pirate **Barracuda** who takes Spanish ships and steals from the Viceroy at every opportunity. In disguise, he and some trusted men are sailing on the ship which is carrying the Contessa Francesca (**Maureen O'Hara**), the daughter of the Mexican Viceroy, to her wedding with Don Alvarado. Naturally she and Laurent meet = sparks and attraction ! Barracuda's ship engages the Spanish one...

and of course we know who will win. In order to avoid more bloodshed, Francesca agrees to marry Laurent, who is strangely eager to tie himself in marriage to this spitfire. Oh well, every man has his weakness.

Arriving in Tortuga, the headquarters of the Brethren of the Coast, Laurent announces his plans to ransom the other Spanish prisoners but his marriage (and the fact that it will bring Don Alvarado and the might of Spain against the pirates) divides his fellow buccaneers. One of these pirates is Anne Bonney, a woman pirate (Binne Barnes). Women pirates ! She and Francesca even fight over Laurent...



Laurent's fellow pirates decide that the best thing for all concerned is to return Francesca to Don Alvarado. In the process, they turn the two, who had begun to trust each other, against each other. Laurent is held captive until they make off with his ship and his wife. But they didn't count on the evil Viceroy taking Laurent's crew captive. But Laurent isn't a man to give up what is his so he sails after them, determined to get Francesca back. *Will he be able to save the day against the might of Spain?*

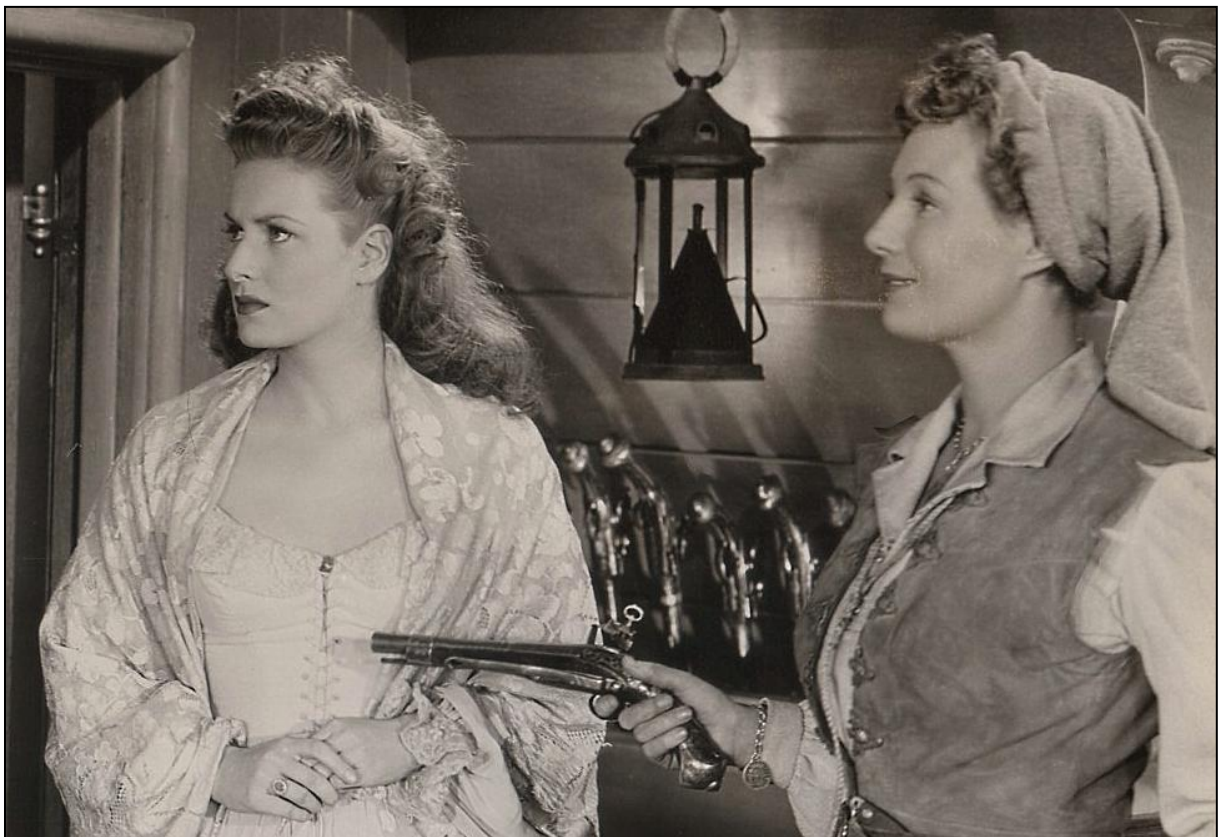
REVIEW

There are **plot holes** all over the place in this film so my advice is just to ignore what doesn't make sense and check out the **glorious Technicolor**. **Maureen O'Hara** never looked lovelier and is given plenty of scenes to wear **dazzling green dresses** which set off her hair. There's also a beautiful sunset with the Barracuda's ship sailing into it, which ends the movie – even though a moment before it was full night. Remember I said plot holes ?



The **fight sequences**, both at sea and on land, are fairly well done, completed with a soaring score filled with violins. Paul Henreid acquits himself well though it's obvious that he's not in the same fencing class as **Basil Rathbone** and **Errol Flynn**. Still, he looks like he's having fun and is given some good leading man lines to riposte against his enemies. Maureen O'Hara starts out as a feisty maiden, even managing to spring the pirates from the dungeons and save Paul while he's fencing for his life. But of course as every *damsel in distress* she has been required to collapse and hang onto Paul a lot towards the end of the film.

There's some **moral confusion** here though because the pirates are presented as the good ones here : they have a great sense of honour and are willingly ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their companions – while the Spanish are evil incarnate.



The Spanish Main is obviously RKO's attempt to cash in on the popularity of pirate films. It's a solid entry to the genre and **not to be missed by swashbuckling fans**. Handsome Austrian Henreid and beautiful O'Hara look great together. Since Henreid's character starts out as a wronged, innocent man, we feel free to cheer him on. Plus there are the obligatory pirate sidekicks to add a dose of comedy when needed. A female pirate and villainous villains complete the picture. While not the best, it's still of the kind "*they just don't make anymore.*"