

Review #60 : *Foreign Correspondant* (1940)

Joel McCrea and Laraine Day

TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFu0T19NYI>



Despite his many defaults and obsessions, Hitchcock had one indubitable talent for sure : the rare ability to tell a story through the medium of film while understanding perfectly the necessary elements needed within a story to **keep an audience enthralled and engaged**. Sure, many may understand these necessities, but it seems few are able to develop them into a high-gearred exciting yet highly improbable entertainment to the level the Master of Suspense did, and that's what makes much of his work so **enduring, even relevant**, so many years later. *Improbable?* Well, after all, no one expects probability in a Hitchcock picture. He often uses some rather obvious tricks of suspense, **diabolically piling on comical diversion** and illusion

of momentous consequence as the **liveliest imagination** could conceive. The secret of the fellow's success is his command of **the least expected**, his use of the **explosive surprise which often verges upon the absurd**. Usually he manages to keep things moving with such **fascinating rapidity** that he never goes over the edge, with the hero hopelessly entangled in a monstrous spy plot, beyond his control or even his comprehension.

That said, being a reasonable fan and all, I have to admit I'm a bit ashamed that it took me so long to get around to watching *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), as it's not only a wonderful Hitchcock feature nominated for 6 Academy Awards and a really great film *per se*.

SYNOPSIS

Joel McCrea plays Johnny Jones, a crime reporter for a major metropolitan newspaper, who gets a new assignment as a foreign correspondent. The editor of the paper is tired of the regurgitated press releases his current correspondents are turning in, and due to the fact Johnny knows little about current international events, so hopefully he'll be more inclined to **provide a fresh perspective**. With the incentive of an expensive account of money, Johnny dives head first into the position. After changing his name to Huntley Haverstock, he is sent to London to cover a peace conference and get an interview with Van Meer, a key man in an organization touting peaceful resolutions to various European conflicts – such as a treaty between the Dutch and Belgians. During the conference, he meets the daughter of Stephen Fisher (**Herbert Marshall**), Carol (**Laraine Day**). Immediately taken with her, he flusters her during her big speech about peace by sending notes to her table, with messages like : ‘*Can we have lunch?*’ and ‘*Do you believe in large families?*’ They meet again at another conference in rainy Amsterdam. A man looking like Van Meer is assassinated right in front of Huntley, in Hitchcock's famous **umbrella scene**. Things take an unexpected turn after the assassination of the leading dignitary, and Johnny seems to be the only one who suspects there's more behind what has happened than it appears. In another renowned scene, his pursuit ends in a windy and lonely **field full of old windmills** with big propellers...

Without giving too much away, the rest of the story is all about spies, backfiring, kidnapping, and daring escapes. Clinging to a meagre handful of leads, Johnny begins to **uncover a seemingly vast conspiracy** that could affect the course of history, with regards to the impending world war. And when the plane all the characters are aboard is shot down over the sea, someone will ultimately sacrifice himself for Carol's happiness...



REVIEW

I came into this film not expecting a lot, even though it was a Hitchcock film, basically because **I had heard so little about it**. The cast here is **incredibly talented**, and is put to good use. Joel McCrea, who would later make himself known in Westerns, does a wonderful job as the tenacious young reporter, dogging out various difficulties to get the story, and managing to find love along the way. Laraine Day also does really well, providing more than just a shallow love interest, but a **fully developed, rich and interesting character** that shares a surprising amount of chemistry with Joel McCrea. The supporting cast, including Herbert Marshall and the excellent George Sanders, further strengthens an already solid film. One aspect of the story I really liked was the **depth of character** given to the main antagonist. This role could have easily been portrayed in a more simplistic fashion, but here it's developed with intelligence and even a certain sympathetic edge. The sets are beautiful and perfectly suited for the story – the windmill scenes are especially rich and detailed. There's a lot going on in this film, and a number of different characters all get their appropriate development. The tension here is a bit subtler than in some of Hitchcock's other films, and it blends in very well, along with the **dramatic and humorous touches**. The **dialogue is sharp and witty**, giving the characters a genuine feel. All in all this is a **thrilling, sophisticated, romantic adventure movie** (with just enough of dashing patriotism) worthy of its place among Hitchcock's more popular films. 120 minutes of sheer fun and exciting entertainment. A real treat ! +++