

FRANK CAPRA'S
LOST HORIZONS

THE

Nick Zegardac's

Hollywood

ART

CAPRA'S ENDURING LOST HORIZONS

"There are no rules in filmmaking. Only sins...and the cardinal sin is dullness."

– Frank Capra

As the final scene of **It's A Wonderful Life** (1946) flickers across our collective television screens each holiday season, the overriding message of its director, that *"no man is a failure who has friends"* seems at once to embody not only the character of every-man George Bailey (James Stewart) but Frank Capra himself. It is that intangible faith in providence imbued in Frank Capra, as a benevolent, hard-working man who had many friends amongst the Hollywood community that saw Capra through nearly five decades of film-making and some of the darkest, yet most ambitious moments of his personal life.

One of the most extraordinary directors of Hollywood's golden age, Capra also had one of the most inauspicious beginnings in film. Frank Capra was born on May 18, 1897 in Bisacquino, Sicily. Derived from Italian parentage, Capra and his family immigrated to the United States in 1903 with the promise of the American dream firmly secured; first in New York, then on June 3, 1903 in Los Angeles. Capra's youth was spent mastering the English language and studying at Castelar and Griffin Elementary Schools. To help support his family he sold newspapers. He was a committed youth, as far as youth's commitments go, and innately aware that his path in life was unlike the one envisioned for him by his parents.

(Top: James Stewart, the perennial 'every man' in Capra's most controversial classic, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* 1939. The film's exposé on graft in the United States Congress ruffled more than a few feathers on Capital Hill. Under duress, Columbia President pulled the film from circulation at the height of its popularity. Nevertheless, it still managed to make a profit for the studio.

Bottom: Frank Capra looking particularly pleased with himself in this Columbia still taken in 1935. Capra had good reason to think well of himself. Apart from *The Three Stooges*, he was primarily the reason why Columbia's coffers could show a considerable profit throughout the decade. Capra's belief in the inherent good in all mankind often manifested itself in a naïve hero pitted against the hypocrisies of the world. This was a reoccurring theme in all his movies.)





More than anything, Capra wanted to learn. Musically inclined, he moonlighted as part of a two-man combo that played the red light district. But it was a stint in chemical engineering at Throop College of Technology that first introduced Capra to his new love - poetry. For one moment, his life seemed idyllic. The moment, however, did not last.

In 1916 Capra's father Turiddu died. The following year, World War I intervened. Despite these setbacks, Capra graduated from Throop. His near enlistment in the Armed Forces was derailed by a virulent bout of Spanish influenza; an unhappy circumstance that resulted in happy chance.

While convalescing, Capra heard that director John Ford was looking for extras for his latest film, **The Outcasts of Poker Flat** (1919). Although he was hired by Ford, extra work did not pay his bills. So Capra assumed a 'jack of all trades/master of none' work ethic; toiling as a ditch digger, running errands, freelancing short stories to local magazines and doing odd jobs of every shape and size. Most of the time, however, he remained unemployed.



Undaunted by his lack of success, together with W. M. Plank, Capra ambitiously incorporated the Tri-State Motion Picture Company of Nevada, producing three short films in 1920 that he also co-wrote. None produced enough revenue to sustain the company and once again Capra returned to Los Angeles with his tail tucked between his legs. By March of that same year, he had accepted work for CBC Film Sales Company (later, Columbia Films Studios); a struggling hand-to-mouth operation in which every member was expected to contribute to a variety of tasks. A quick study, Capra learned the rudiments of editing and directing during this tenure. Still, success eluded him.



In 1921 Capra was hired at seventy-five dollars a week by Walter Montague to direct **Fulton Fisher's Boarding House**. Modestly budgeted at \$1700, the film's \$3500 gross convinced Montague of Capra's talents.

(Top: Gary Cooper and Capra share an intimate laugh between takes on **Mr. Deeds Goes To Town** 1936. The film transplanted a simpleton tuba player from the idyllic 'pixelated' community of Bedford Falls to the wily and dangerous big city. Deeds is heir to a fortune that his attorney schemes to have taken away from him.



Middle: Capra's first big success: Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert in **It Happened One Night** 1934. Shot on a shoestring budget, no one had faith in the film. It debuted as a runaway hit, sweeping all four major categories on Oscar night.

Middle: Babe Bennett (Jean Arthur) implores Longfellow Deeds (Gary Cooper) to defend himself at trial in **Mr. Deed Goes To Town**.

Bottom: Jefferson Smith (James Stewart) refuses to yield from his filibuster on the floor of the U.S. senate in **Mr. Smith Goes To Washington** 1939. Smith's boyhood mentor turned corrupt politico (Claude Rains) looks on.)

But a minor rift in their early partnership once again sent Capra's career into a tail spin. It was not until Capra, working as an editor in 1923, met and married Helen Howell that the tide of his folly began to slowly turn.

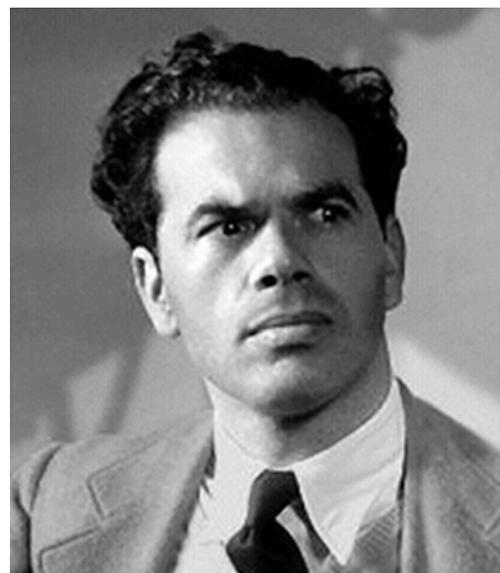
A move to Hollywood gave Capra his first real job at a real studio, writing gags for Hal Roach's **Our Gang** series. Disinterested with this assignment, Capra next went to Mack Sennett Studios and absorbed the opportunity to work on material for comedian Harry Langdon. Langdon was so impressed with Capra's efforts he hired him to direct **The Strong Man**.

By October 1927, CBC had become Columbia Pictures – a burgeoning, if struggling, new film studio. Unlike its rivals, Columbia Pictures had no roster of contract talent. Quite simply, they could not afford to invest in the star system the way MGM did. Rather, Production Chief Harry Cohn borrowed his talent from an ever expanding pool of freelance artists that included such luminaries as Irene Dunne, Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn. Although quickly hired by this tyrannical mogul, Capra was almost as quickly fired after Cohn viewed the early dailies from Capra's first assignment at the studio, **That Certain Thing** (1927) and judged them disastrous.

Despite this quiet early animosity brewing between them, Capra continued to work for Cohn – steadily gaining in prestige with each subsequent project. Capra's early and close association with screenwriter Robert Riskin and cameraman Joseph Walker had begun to develop a distinct style for the studio that was both lightheartedly inspirational and humanitarian.

What Harry Cohn really wanted and needed at this particular point in his studio's history was a mega hit to fill his coffers and mark the official debut of Columbia as a force to be reckoned with. That zeitgeist everyone had hoped for was **It Happened One Night** (1934) – a classic screwball comedy affectionately discounted at its inception by Cohn as 'a road picture.' But for once, fate was on Capra's side.

A tiff between Clark Gable and his alma mater, MGM had resulted in Gable being loaned to Columbia for the project as punishment. Claudette Colbert, a temperamental rising star in her own right, emphatically refused to make the film at first. Colbert was strong-armed by Harry Cohn into complying and thereafter openly chastised her forced labor to anyone who would listen – including gossip columnist Hedda Hopper. With no just cause, Colbert openly despised Capra, whom she deemed complicit in her being forced to do the film. At the end of her last day of shooting, Colbert telephoned a friend to say that she had **"just completed the worst picture of (her) life!"**





But the proof was in the can. Upon its premiere, **It Happened One Night** was an instant and colossal financial and critical success, winning in all four key Oscar categories: Best Actor (Gable), Actress (Colbert), Director (the first of three statuettes for Capra) and Best Picture. Awash in the overnight sensation of instant fame, Capra could now write his own ticket. He directed the effervescent **Mr. Deeds Goes to Town** (1936), the controversial **Mr. Smith Goes To Washington** (1939) and, on loan out, the lighthearted caper, **Arsenic and Old Lace** (1941).

But by far, Capra and Columbia's most ambitious collaborative effort to date was the epically mounted, **Lost Horizon** (1937).

(Previous page, top: Capra's early head shot illustrates a stern outlook to his approach to directing movies. Though Capra had a clear vision of how he wanted his movies to look, his approach to dealing with thorny personalities was more 'gentle touch' than 'authoritarian rule.' Those who knew Capra best were committed to doing their best for him and found it difficult to argue with his persuasive good nature on set.

Middle: James Stewart and Edward Arnold share a chuckle in Capra's **You Can't Take It With You** 1938. It is one of Hollywood's ironies that the most featherweight of all Capra's pre-war work should net him his second round of Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director.

Middle: Babe Bennett (Jean Arthur) is the reluctant debutante recoiling in Longfellow Deeds' (Gary Cooper) arms. By night, Babe courts the man she has already assumed is a sap – nicknaming him 'The Cinderella Man' for the sake of writing scathing copy for her newspaper.

A hard bitten realist, Babe eventually comes to realize that Longfellow is that rarest of male animals – an honest man. As their romance blossoms, his reputation with the Depression ridden public goes from bad to worse and a near fatal confrontation with an impoverished 'forgotten man.'

Bottom: A doleful Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert) is taken down the isle by her father (Walter Connelly) in **It Happened One Night** 1934. Initially, Ellie had escaped her father's authoritarian rule to run away with the man she is about to marry – King Marchand, only to realize that she loves another; the newspaper hound with a heart of gold – Peter Warren (Clark Gable).

This page: Lionel Barrymore and Edward Arnold pose as a respective pair of father-in-laws, eyeing the growing love relationship of their children, played by James Stewart and Jean Arthur. Arthur was a Capra favorite, often cast as the clear-eyed realist whose feet are firmly planted until a hapless male comes along to snooker her into his light-headed way of thinking.)



GETTING LOST ALONG THE WAY FRANK CAPRA & LOST HORIZON (1937)

“A hunch is creativity trying to tell you something.” – Frank Capra

Frank Capra’s departure from his usual feel good tales of the ‘every man;’ **Lost Horizon** (1937) was based on James Hilton’s best-selling novel; all about British diplomat, Robert Conway – a man of substance who discovers peace on earth in the mythical enclave of Shangri-La. The book read strictly as utopian fantasy. But in the film, Capra managed to interject something of a timeless message for peace that continues to find authenticity in today’s worldly struggles; and something else, a note of sinister darkness emanating from the periphery of that perfect world.

From the benevolently mysterious Chang (H.B. Warner in an Oscar nominated role) to Sam Jaffe’s haunted performance as the High Lama, there remains a sense of doomed folly about this gentle oasis – an ominous precursor leading up to the film’s climactic moment of realization.

For some time Capra had wanted to make a film based on Hilton’s novel. However, realizing the considerable budget such a project would demand, Harry Cohn had withstood Capra’s requests for as long as he could. With Cohn’s reluctant complicity, and together with Robert Riskin and Sidney Buchman, Capra began the arduous task of hammering out a screen narrative.

(Top: principle cast from left: Ronald Colman as diplomat Robert Conway; John Howard, his brother George; Isabel Jewell, fallen woman Gloria Stone; Thomas Mitchell, Henry Barnard, and, Margo as the mysterious Russian, Maria. Right: a rather misleading poster depicting Conway as a man between two women - Jane Wyatt, to his left, who plays his love interest Sondra and Margo who has only a minor role. Bottom: George confronts paleontologist Alexander P. Lovett (Edward Everett Horton) as to why his name is not registered with the British Embassy in Baskul. Horton’s inclusion in the film is strictly for comic relief, a skill the actor possessed in spades.)





(Visions of a Shangri-La that might have been. *Lost Horizon* was a complex undertaking and, as filming progressed, Capra made major alterations to the screenplay, reshaping, or in some cases, discarding whole scenes he had already shot. Above: the original opening for the film was to have taken place in the present day with Robert Conway (Ronald Colman) returning to Britain on the S.S. *Manchurian*.

Suffering from amnesia, Conway is stirred to remembrances of the mythical Shangri-La after hearing a Chopin piece played in the ship's piano lounge. Relaying his story to friends, who think either the tale too fantastic or the man not in his right mind, Conway escapes the *Manchurian* through a porthole. Thus begins his journey of rediscovery.

Right: the fallen woman (Isabel Jewell) confides in Sondra, a resident, that ever since her arrival to Shangri-La her health, as well as her faith in humanity has slowly begun to be restored. Perhaps the most regrettable omissions from the film as it exists today are moments like these that illustrate a genuine and growing bond between its central characters. In the final cut, only Conway seems to have been impacted in a meaningful way.



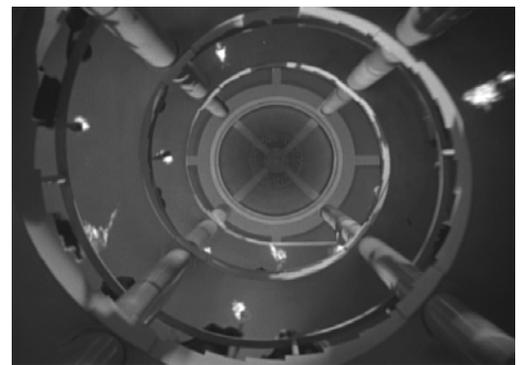
Middle: Sondra worries that George's restlessness will encourage Conway to leave Shangri-La in this scene cut from the final film. In fact, her worse fears are realized when Maria tells George and Conway that she is being held in Shangri-La against her will and under the spell of Chang (H.B. Warner) who is lying about the fountain of youth qualities Shangri-La is supposed to possess.



According to Chang, Maria is over 200 years old, though she does not look a day over 21. George's impatience to return to Britain convinces Conway to believe Maria's explanation over Chang's. The trio leaves Shangri-La on the eve of the High Lama's funeral, only to discover that without the community's mysticism close at hand, Maria does indeed return to her natural state – as a mummified 200 year old corpse.

Below: Capra shot an extended and rather lavish processional for the High Lama's funeral with a myriad of torch bearers marching through the lamasery at night. This stunning shot looking up into the spiral stairwell never appears in the final cut.

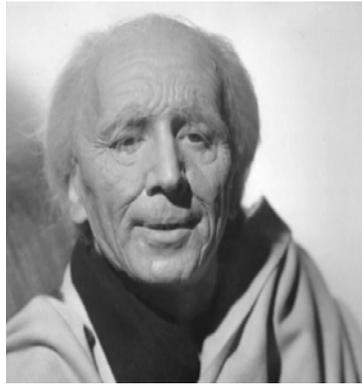
Bottom: Capra and his Production Designer oversee an early artist's conception of the lamasery. The original plan, to adhere closely to Tibetan architectural principles, was discarded by Capra for the now famous construction of a fanciful art deco paradise – more Hollywood meets Frank Lloyd Wright than anything else. At the time, purists were outraged by this decision. The set, the largest ever then built, was misperceived as garish. Time, however, has proven Capra's choice in setting is both magical and timeless.)



The project began in earnest with the construction of a complex 'flashback' devise that Capra filmed on March 23, 1936 but later jettisoned from the final cut. In this flashback, British foreign secretary Robert Conway (Ronald Colman) is seen aboard the S.S. *Manchurian* bound for home. Conway is suffering from amnesia until a piano concerto stirs his memory. Impromptu, Conway plays an unpublished Chopin piece.

When asked curiously where he learned the music, Conway distantly replies, "*Shangri-La*" and the story unfolded from there. However, after viewing Capra's rough cut – over five hours in length – Harry Cohn ordered the story severely cut. To accommodate Cohn, Capra discarded this meticulously conceived preface.





(Will the real High Lama please stand up? Top left: actor Sam Jaffe's professional head shot. One of the most accomplished actors of his generation, Jaffe's political views were increasingly suspected of siding with the Communist party and, as a direct result, hampered the actor's ability to procure work in Hollywood.

Middle: Jaffe in preliminary and final make-up as the High Lama. Columbia President Harry Cohn found the original make-up creepy and ordered a softening of the creases and lines, particularly around the eyes and chin.

Far right: After screening Jaffe's test footage, Cohn encouraged Capra to also test Walter Connelly for the part. Connelly's make-up was more whimsical and sage-like; note the Santa-like beard.

Right and below: Ronald Colman and Connelly pose for this publicity still. One of Capra's chief objections to casting Connelly was that his robust physicality belied the original description of the High Lama as fragile. Jaffe's more gaunt features seemed better suited and, in fact, after comparing the footage of Conway and the High Lama's speech, Harry Cohn had to agree with Capra that Jaffe had been the ideal choice all along.

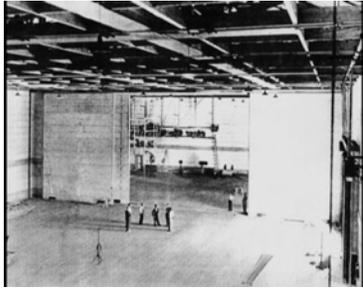
Bottom: a still of Jaffe as the High Lama, informing Conway that he is to be entrusted with the continuation of Shangri-La after the Lama's passing – a prophecy realized in the film.

Instead, the film would open with Conway evacuating the last remnants of white society from the war torn city of Baskul. These unfortunates include Conway's brother, George (John Howard), a playful knockabout, Henry Barnard (Thomas Mitchell), a scatterbrained fossil expert – not in the novel, Alexander P. Lovett (Edward Everett Horton) and a fatally stricken prostitute, Gloria Stone (Isabel Jewell).

Capra shot most of this footage in April of 1936 at Van Nuys Airport, leasing a Douglas DC-2 and importing 500 Chinese extras (many of whom could not speak English and therefore did not understand the instructions being given) barely visible - except in a brief long shot in the final cut. Together with scenarist Robert Riskin, Capra also added a sequence on location not derived from James Hilton's novel; the burning of a hanger to light the runway for evacuating planes.

Escaping on the last plane out of Baskul, Conway and company soon discover that they have been hijacked by a mysterious Oriental pilot (Val Durand) who is flying them deep into the Tibetan mountains. Tragedy strikes as the pilot suffers a fatal heart attack and the plane crash lands on a snowy plain.





(Mysteries of Shangri-La debunked. Top row from left: California Consumers Corporation provided a snow-making apparatus capable of pulverized and blowing ten tons of ice blocks. The snow machine is seen in this test footage shot by C.C.C.'s President Niles Rothram.

A mockup of the D.C. plane after its crash landing is built inside one of C.C.C.'s refrigeration warehouses. Note the miles of cooling tubes running the length of the ceiling. Throughout the shoot, temperatures were maintained at 24 degrees. A section of the mountain terrain built to depict the arduous journey Conway and his friends take to get to Shangri-La. Although the movie incorporated authentic footage from Storm Over Monte Blanc (1930), cast and crew never left the relative safety of the Columbia back lot to shoot most of the movie.

Bottom row from left: Columbia's massive sound stage with its sliding wall was used to shoot most of Lost Horizon's interiors. Middle: on an outdoor miniature an unknown extra prepares to shoot a process plate of the lamasery in long shot against a gypsum recreation of the Himalayan Mountains. Far right: an aerial view of the Columbia Ranch – a property the studio owned expressly for the purpose of building outdoor sets. The lamasery in full scale – then the largest set ever built for a film – can be seen in the upper right corner.

Right: Capra was dissatisfied with the costumes for the extras provided by Central Costuming and ordered their sleeves slit to suggest a more rugged, worn look. Here the Property Master tends to an extra.

Bottom: shooting the arrival into paradise. Note Capra's two camera set up. The director was determined that Lost Horizon should be covered from practically every conceivable angle.

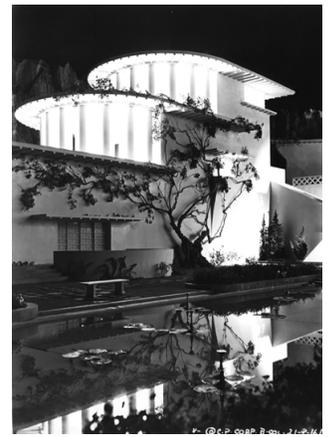


What had always been of utmost concern to Capra during his preliminary work on **Lost Horizon** was how to create not only 'the look', but also 'the feel' of extreme cold. His own 1931 story of the South Pole – **Daredevil**, had incorporated gypsum and marble dust to simulate snowfall. Although this had been effective for 'the look', no breath from his actor's showed. For **Lost Horizon** Capra was determined to remedy this oversight.

Capra contacted Niles Rothram, the production manager of California Consumer's Corporation and leased one of their refrigerated warehouses for 23 days. Inside this mammoth 13,000 square ft. space – refrigerated to a temperature of only







(Previous page: one of the most magical sequences in the film is the rescue party's first glimpse of Shangri-La, the mythological Tibetan paradise. Top left: Conway (Ronald Colman) stares back at the frozen trail they have just come from with Shangri-La in the background. This long shot was a trick, utilizing the miniature set photographed on a process plate and then registered with Conway in the foreground. Top right: Chang (H.B. Warner) welcomes Conway to paradise. Warner, whose most famous movie role had been that of Christ in DeMille's silent version of *King of Kings* (1928), came to embody the haunted mystery of Shangri-La, thanks in large part to his cryptic explanations provided to any and all inquiries from his curious new arrivals.

Second row, left: the cast at the Columbia ranch with the full scale Shangri-La. The mountain range behind the central façade is another process plate trick effect. Right: Adjusting his glasses, Barnard (Thomas Mitchell) declares "It's magic!" in disbelief. The sense of wonderment and awe is shared by the audience as the principles make their way to the main building.

Third row: Capra photographed his set from every angle as the Conway and his entourage approach. Three views from left: an overhead, looking down with the grand fountain outlined in cobblestone. Middle and right: two closer views of the lamasery, with curious monks looking down at the new arrivals. Curiously, after this initial introduction, the monks are never again seen in the film.

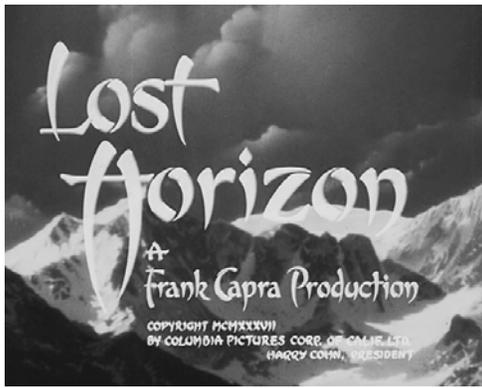
Bottom row, left: Conway's first sight of Sondra (Jane Wyatt) prompts a smile that (middle) is reciprocated only after Conway trips on a paving stone. Right: the rescue party arrives at the lamasery's central façade. Initially, this scene was to continue with Chang informing Conway and his friends of their pending accommodations and instructing his men to make ready their rooms. As it exists in the film today, this scene dissolves directly into the evening dinner where Chang explains that there is no communication with the outside world.

This page, top left: Chang explains the social protocol of the land to Conway. Shangri-La's utopian society requires no formal institutions of law to regulate the behavior of its citizenry. Middle: Conway has just knocked his brother unconscious after he attempted to coerce a native with a pistol. The sequence is one of the most awkward in the film and no doubt was created to infuse a bit of excitement and danger into the otherwise idyllic circumstances. There is no explanation as to where George acquired the weapon. The sequence ends with an abrupt fade out. Far right: a publicity still of Shangri-La lit at night.

Right: a publicity still of Ronald Colman and Jane Wyatt looking appropriately optimistic and in love. In the film, the relationship between Sondra and Conway is rather paper thin. He inexplicably falls in love with her after first seeing her on one of the balconies upon his arrival to Shangri-La. She is drawn to his tender kindness almost as quickly.

Bottom: immediately following George's gun totting incident in the lamasery's grand foyer, Conway demands that his audience with the High Lama no longer be delayed, directly telling Chang "There better be a High Lama." Moments later, Conway will find himself face to face with the ancient mystic played by Sam Jaffe.)





Our story starts in the war-torn Chinese city of Baskul, where Robert Conway has been sent to evacuate ninety white people before they are butchered in a local revolution.

Baskul--
the night of March 10,
1935.



Our story starts in the war-torn Chinese city of Baskul, beset by the invaders from Japan, where Robert Conway has been sent to evacuate ninety white people before they are butchered by the Japanese hordes.

Baskul--
the night of July 7,
1937



(Depending on what year you saw *Lost Horizon* the prologue to the film changed. Above, top row: the original credits as they appeared for the 1937 release and bottom: as they read for the 1942 reissue.)

Following President Roosevelt's quip about military planes taking off from a secret base in Shangri-La, Harry Cohn ordered a timely prologue to capitalize on America's involvement in WWII. Note, that in the middle frame, the 'local revolution' taking place in Baskul has been upgraded to an onslaught by Japanese invaders. In the final title, the date has also been upgraded from March 10, 1935 to July 7, 1937.

For years, reissues of the film in theaters and on television carried these revamped credits until restoration expert Robert Gitt and UCLA undertook a search for the original main title sequence – recently restored for the DVD release of the film.

Left: John Howard, wearing one of the costumes from the film, points out details in set design to his parents who visited him on the set during production. Below: Conway and his friends are intercepted by Chang after their plane has crashed. Bottom: the lamasery burns brightly with the torches of mourners on their way to pay their last respects to the High Lama.)



24 degrees, a full size mock up of the crashed plane was reassembled with props and an ice chipper capable of delivering 11 tons of pulverized ice as snow into the air. To add to the scope of these snowy sequences, Capra would later insert legitimate stock shots from Arnold Fanck's German film, **Storm Over Mont Blanc** (1930).



His first problem overcome, Capra returned to the narrative with all the escapees survived, but stranded in the frozen tundra until an unlikely rescue party headed by a mysterious native, Chang (H.B. Warner) arrives. Chang leads Conway and his party through the frozen wilderness to a hidden paradise within the mountain range that is strangely warm, inviting and idealistic in its philosophies on life. There, Conway meets Sondra (Jane Wyatt), the woman who



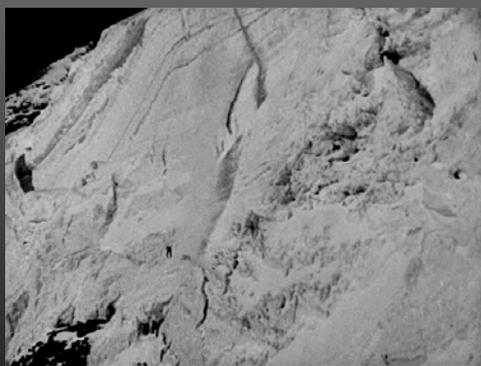
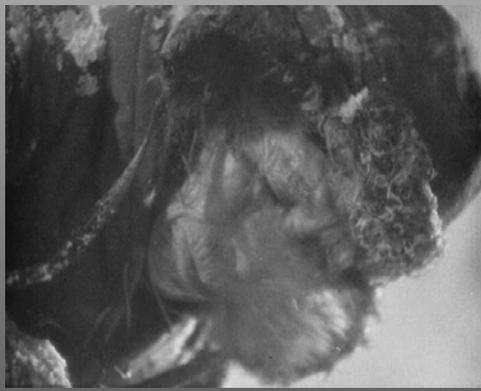
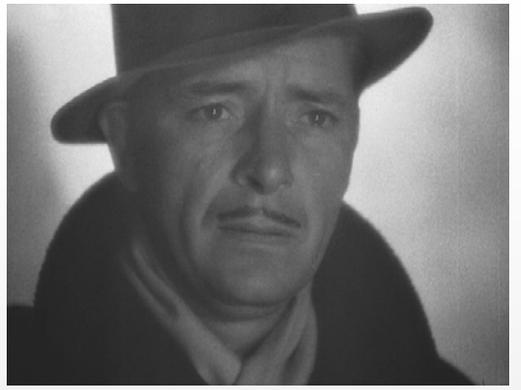
(Above: With both plane engines frozen into silence from the extreme cold, Conway and his entourage brace for the worst as their aircraft goes down in the mountains.)

will inspire his love. Conway is also introduced to Father Pereaux – the High Lama (Sam Jaffe).

The sheer scope in creation of the mythical Shangri-La as a tangible lost paradise can not be underestimated. Capra employed Supervising Art Director Steven Goosson and Art Directors Paul Murphy and Lionel Banks to realize this idealized structure. The final design, though embodying all of the mystery and magic Capra had been looking for, was met with considerable resistance from architectural purists because its inspiration drew more from the deco designs of Frank Lloyd Wright than legitimate Tibetan architecture. Nevertheless, the lamasery set constructed at the Columbia Ranch, measuring 500 feet wide, 1000 feet long and with a central façade towering 90 feet tall, was one of the largest and most impressive full scale sets ever built for a movie.

Upon arrival to this magical place, the troop is skeptical about their hospitable host. However, subtle miraculous things begin to happen almost from the start. Conway discovers inner piece. Gloria's failing health is slowly restored. Lovett reconnects with his innate abilities as an educator and Henry begins to fall in love with Gloria.

Only George is unhappy. He views Shangri-la as his prison; an interpretation furthered by his chance meeting and growing affections toward a young Russian girl, Maria (Margo) who longs to escape the controlled serenity and return to her native country. To quell George's suspicions, Conway finagles a meeting with the benevolent ruler of Shangri-La: the High Lama.





(Previous page, top row left: The film's penultimate moment of truth. Having convinced Conway that she is being held at Shangri-La against her will by Chang; Maria, George and Conway steal off into the night on the eve of the High Lama's funeral with the aid of some traveling porters. Middle: they are spotted by Chang and Sondra from the lamasery's balcony. Sondra makes chase. Right: as Conway nears the precipice separating the serenity he once hoped for and the dangerous snowy terrain outside, something seems to beckon him for a moment of saddened reflection.

Second row: Sondra stands at the grotto leading to the outside world with Shangri-La's lamasery burning brightly in the background. She calls to Bob, but there is no answer. Middle and right: the porters that George has engaged are a band of cutthroats. As Maria's condition begins to weaken, the porters get ahead of Conway and George who holler back for their return. Instead, the leader of the porters fires his pistol in their direction, triggering an avalanche that kills every last one of them – leaving Conway, Maria and George to fend for themselves in the frozen wilderness.



Third row, left: Maria looks on in horror as the avalanche consumes her last chance for freedom. Middle: the trio continues their journey along a dangerous mountain pass. Right: but Maria has been removed from the mythical and therapeutic magic of Shangri-La for too long and collapses in the snow.

Fourth row, left: Conway slings Maria over his shoulder, revealing her face to George who suddenly realizes something is terribly wrong. Middle: "Look at her face!" he hollers to Conway – a sad, mummified remain. Right: Conway and George find a grotto out of the cold and lay Maria's corpse down to inspect her. She has advanced to the age of 200, as Chang claimed she was all along.

Fifth row, left: unable to comprehend either the truth or his own misery, George suffers his final breakdown in the grotto. Middle: he runs out of the grotto and plummets to his death down the mountain side. Right: a defeated Conway is left to fend for himself without food, companionship or guidance.



This page, top: Ronald Colman and Capra discuss Conway's arrival to Shangri-La. Going into the project, Colman was suspicious of Capra's methods of directing. Gradually, he came to respect Capra's vision. Middle: Capra goes over a scene with H.B. Warner not in the finished film. Upon arriving to Shangri-La, Chang is supposed to go before the High Lama and inform him that Conway and his party have arrived; the implication being that the crash of Conway's plane had been deliberately staged.

Middle: Sam Jaffe in full Lama makeup and costume is flanked by Colman and Capra just outside of stage 2 in between takes. Bottom: Preparing to shoot Conway's arrival at a Tibetan village after his escape from Shangri-La. Conway collapses at the base of a mausoleum and is tended to by the locals.)



From the start, Capra had wanted noted character actor Sam Jaffe for this role. Harry Cohn, however, was not at all convinced – perhaps, largely due to the fact that Jaffe's political affiliations had loosely branded him a potential Communist sympathizer. Reluctantly, and at the behest of Cohn's urgings, Capra hired Walter Connelly for the part and re-shot all of the High Lama's sequences on a newly constructed set.

However, when Cohn screened both Jaffe and Connelly's performances he had to reluctantly concur with Capra, that his first choice of Jaffe had been the right one all along. Even before this minor controversy, gossip columnist Louella Parsons managed to generate a sensation over the casting of the High Lama with a puff piece. In it, she Parsons claimed that actors A.E. Anson and Henry Waffle had both been tested

for the role. Anson then became ill and Waffle died – an ominous precursor that made Jaffe’s debut all the more dramatic.

One aspect of Jaffe’s performance that Cohn absolutely refused to relent on was its length. Capra had literally photographed whole speeches verbatim from Hilton’s original text. In some cases, these speeches ran on for more than twenty minutes at a time – a length that both Cohn and the author agreed slowed down the narrative and damaged the overall impact of the film.

The narrative progressed with George prodding his brother to steal away into the night with him and Maria. Warned earlier that Maria is two hundred years old (even though she looks no more than twenty-one), the prophecy of her fate is fulfilled when, after venturing beyond Shangri-La’s ageless borders, she decomposes into a mummified corpse before Conway and George’s eyes. Realizing that the mysticism and magic of Shangri-la is legitimate, George succumbs to a mad cowardice, throwing himself off the mountainside and leaving Conway to fend for himself.

Half frozen and starved, Conway is discovered by natives in a small Tibetan village and reunited with British colleagues in London. But he cannot get either Shangri-la or Sondra out of his mind. Abandoning his duties, Conway drudges back through the snow in search of the peace he left behind.

Although Capra provided Conway and his audience with a fleeting glimpse of Shangri-la glistening in the distance through the wind-swept Himalayas he never quite rectified the journey for either Conway or his audience. Does Conway get back to Shangri-la? Does he find Sondra awaiting his return? Or has he merely hallucinated paradise lost and is doomed to die alone on the frozen mountain?

Undoubtedly, Capra’s attention to authenticity was working overtime. But it was also working against Harry Cohn’s patience. In the end, Capra lost six reels of footage – much of it establishing the burgeoning romances and sublime changes occurring to the temperament of the entire rescue party. As a result, the narrative – even today – tends to suffer from a series of inexplicable gaps that leave a choppy impression of character development. Still, Capra had hoped for success beyond all his previous endeavors.

(Right, top: A.E. Anson pictured in a still from *Aerosmith* 1933 with Ronald Colman was rumored to have been Capra’s first choice for the High Lama. Middle: Sondra and Conway share an embrace in this publicity still that suggests she is already aware of Conway’s pending departure. In the film, Sondra is far more naive. Middle: Colman and John Howard await direction on the lamasery’s landing. Bottom: Conway checking a light meter before shooting Jane Wyatt’s first close up in the film.)





Unhappy chance for both director and mogul that **Lost Horizon's** three and a half hour preview in Santa Barbara was not what either expected. Disappointed and disillusioned by the lack of immediate response to the film he considered his masterwork, Capra reluctantly distilled his narrative to a mere 132 minutes – functional and compelling, though hardly inclusive of all the effort he had put forth in the preceding months.



Even then, the general release of **Lost Horizon** failed to recoup its \$1,200,000 budget. But the story of **Lost Horizon** – the film - did not end there. During an unrelated press conference in 1941, with America's involvement in World War II looming on the European horizon, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made a reference in jest to a U.S. hidden military base being located in Shangri-La. Almost instantly, there was a renewed interest from audiences to see the film again. However, for its 1942 reissue, Harry Cohn modified the film even further, cutting its running time down to 107 minutes and changing its main title to the more awkward **Lost Horizon of Shangri-La**, in order to capitalize on Roosevelt's inference.



From that moment on, the film as it came to be more widely known and generally exploited through television and private screenings only existed in the Cohn (not Capra) final cut. Shelved for years, **Lost Horizon's** original camera negative eventually deteriorated to the point of no return in the mid-1960s. It was thrown away – leaving only a truncated second and third generation print available for future public viewing.

However, in the mid-1970s preservationist Robert Gitt and UCLA's preservation archive undertook to conduct research for a full blown restoration of Capra's original 132 minute cut. From varying source material gathered around the world, and still photos inserted to compensate for the (as yet) still missing footage, Gitt and his associates managed to cut together a facsimile of what the original film must have played like. Sadly, as a film in totem, **Lost Horizon** remains a lost film.



(Refueling Conway's plane midway between Baskul and Shangri-La. Top: an extra sounds the alert that Conway's plane is about to land. Capra had his Tibetan extras slash the metal gas cans with their bayonets to add a sense of violence and immediacy to the sequence.

Middle: an extra peers through a window at Gloria (Isabel Jewell) as he pours gas into the plane's wing.

The Douglas D.C. 10 plane leased for this sequence actual flew over the Mohave Desert, not the Himalayas. Despite meticulous planning and a long shoot, this sequence was eventually cut down to a few brief moments in the finished film.)

POSTSCRIPT to the career of Frank Capra

"I made mistakes in drama. I thought drama was when actors cried. Drama is when the audience cries."

– Frank Capra

After **Lost Horizon**, Capra continued to garner success and praise for his work, most notably his second Best Director's Oscar for 1938's **You Can't Take It With You**. In the 1940s, he was much in demand, thanks to **Meet John Doe** (1941, right) and the stirring political drama, **State of the Union** (1946).

Capra's career was sidetracked with a commitment to co-direct eight military propaganda documentaries between 1942 and 1945. The **Why We Fight** series earned him more Oscars, but it put his professional career in feature films on hold.

His postwar return to features – **It's a Wonderful Life** (bottom, now, regarded as the quintessential holiday classic) was virtually ignored upon its initial release. Produced under Capra's Liberty Films, it literally bankrupted his fledgling company.

Disappointed, Capra did films for other studios on a freelance basis, remaking some of his old movies and indulging in more like-minded light and fluffy fare that had served him well earlier.

However, more often than not, these subsequent projects; **Here Comes The Groom** (1951) and **A Hole in the Head** (1959) met with cynical audience indifference. Capra's final film **A Pocketful of Miracles** (1961) was a remake of his own **Lady for A Day** (1933) a once poignant programmer turned obnoxious by Bette Davis' gregarious central performance.

Capra gracefully retired from filmmaking in 1961; content to quietly age out of the public spotlight, yet still gracious enough to accept invitations and interviews. He produced several television specials in his later years and even found the time to pen his memoirs: *The Name Above The Title*.

Ever interested in providing perspective to young film makers, Frank Capra remained active until his death from a heart attack at the age of 94 in 1991. The man may be gone, but his legacy on film, that inimitable belief in a better tomorrow is eternal and ingrained in anyone whose thoughts are only half secured in reality, and with one foot still caught in a daydream.

