

BOFFO ENTERTAINMENT

– before and after

'The Rains Came!'

by Nick Zegarac



Clarence Brown's dazzling spectacle for 20th Century Fox, the star-studded **The Rains Came** (1939) is a grand epic cut from the same lavishly produced artistic tapestry as **Gone With The Wind** or **The Wizard of Oz**. Philip Dunne's screenplay, based on the novel by Louis Bromfeld, captures the mysterious flavor, magic and tragedy of India, hit by a monsoon of titanic proportions.

The tale begins in earnest in the fictional village of Ranchipur. Artist and heir to a hollow English title, Tom Ransome (George Brent) is whittling his life away in boredom on a plantation. Frequenting by bouts of alcoholism and depression, Tom's singular pleasure is derived from his friendship with the Royal family, Maharani (Maria Ouspenskaya), Sir Man Singh Bahadur Maharajah (H.B Warner), and their son and heir apparent, Major Rama Safti (Tyrone Power). Safti has just returned from America where he has completed his schooling as a physician.



Intending to use his knowledge to benefit the poor and sick of Ranchipur, Safti is introduced to Tom's old flame, Lady Edwina Esketh (Myrna Loy) at a palace party. Though married to the boorish Lord Albert (Nigel Bruce), Edwina flaunts her feminine wiles in the hopes of trading in her Lord for the Prince. Early on, Tom warns her against a relationship with Safti. She is not his equal. Naturally, Edwina thinks Tom is jealous. Lord Albert, bitter and aware that his wife does not love him, becomes bed-ridden with malaria. Prescribed treatment by Safti, Albert browbeats his valet and nurse with demand upon demand – generally making a damn nuisance of himself.

Meanwhile Miss MacDaid (Mary Nash) is attempting to throw her niece, Fern Simon (Brenda Joyce) at Tom's head. Their first encounter is both awkward and provoked but steadily a subtle and enduring relationship begins to blossom. Ah, but then there are the rains. The monsoon season arrives with its torrential down pours that quickly flood the streets of Ranchipur. But the flood is not the latest cause for concern. A massive earthquake devastates the village, toppling buildings and forcing the dam to break. The deluge that follows kills thousands.

In the wake of this epic natural disaster Lord Albert dies and Edwina, to prove her mettle, enlists as a nurse for the injured and the dying. Her tireless commitment forces Safti to reconsider Edwina's motives. He falls desperately in love with her and vows to renounce the throne and his people for her love. But Edwina falls victim to the plague, forcing Safti to recognize that his place is with people.

Initially budgeted at two and a half million dollars, another \$100,000 was added to make the film's final moments, where Safti ascends the throne, as lavish and eye-popping as anything seen on the screen. Throughout the extended 100 day shooting schedule Production Chief Darryl F. Zanuck saw to it that no expense was spared. His attention to details was well rewarded when the film's climactic flood and quake special effects easily won an Academy Award. Utilizing fourteen cameras, director, Brown and camera man Arthur C. Miller managed to capture the sheer colossal size and scope of the destruction of Ranchipur, placing a human face on the terrifying elements of natural disaster. In quality then, as well as size, *The Rains Came* delivers.

THE RAINS COME TO DVD

Fox's DVD transfer is reasonably satisfying. Though age related artifacts are present, I suspect a considerable amount of preservation has gone into making this film look as good as it possibly can. Overall then, the gray scale is nicely contrasted



and balanced with deep solid blacks and, for the most part, clean whites. Film grain is present but not distracting. The image is generally sharp with fine detail present in during the darkest scenes. The audio has been remixed to stereo surround but the original mono is also included for purists. In truth there is very little to recommend the stereo mix. Apart from the flood/quake sequence, this is a dialogue driven star vehicle adequately served by the original theatrical sound field. The only extra Fox provides on this disc is an interesting commentary by film historians Anthony Slide and Robert Birchard, and a stills gallery.

BOTTOM LINE: *The Rains Came* is 'boffo' big-budget box office entertainment. It excels, as so many films of 1939 did, in telling a human saga against the backdrop of terrific odds against the natural world and its message is clear and life-affirming: try as they might – the rains cannot wash away the progress of mankind. Environmentalists will scoff and say, "pity that." An absolute must!

