

WAR AND PEACE

THE MAN IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SUIT

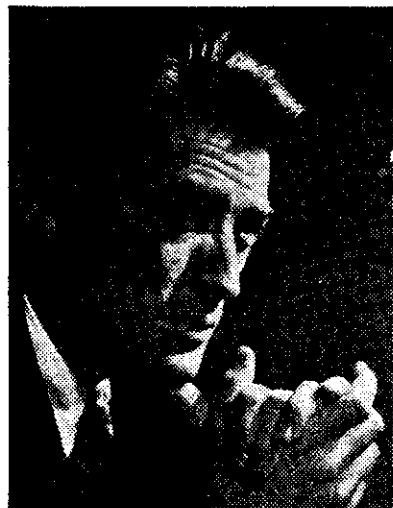
(20th Century-Fox)

Y Cert.

SEVERAL things built up my consumer-resistance to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. I had ploughed through the book, then I was late at the booking-office, and found myself rubbernecking at the wide screen from the front stalls, like a fan in the bleachers at Wimbledon. To make matters more uncomfortable, the supporting bill offered one indifferent newsreel, and two filmed advertisements. There's nothing, I suppose, that one can do about the latter except scream impotently, but I hereby affirm that I am now boycotting one make of cigarette, one brand of chocolates, and a wave-setting lotion. *Caveat vendor!*

Faced, after all that, with something like two and three-quarter miles of De Luxe-coloured CinemaScope (and nary a yard of gray flannel, so far as I could see), I was surprised to find the efforts of Darryl Zanuck, Nunnally Johnson, Fredric March and Gregory Peck holding my attention as they did. This is, I think, most immediately to the credit of Nunnally Johnson, who scripted as well as directed the production. If he hasn't kept the footage down he has at least cut back the story to a more credible and creditable pattern of behaviour, something a little closer to our own experience than the novel was. The problems of the hero, Tommy Rath, are solved in the film by his innate predisposition to honesty rather than by the prospect of a sizeable killing on the real-estate market, as the book (unintentionally, perhaps) suggested.

Tom's problems, like those of the characters in Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives*, are problems of adjustment. Ten years after the war, in which he served as a paratrooper, he is still toting a load of guilt and remorse—the men he killed, the girl he left in Italy, the child he may have fathered there. It's none the less real because it may be commonplace, and for once we get it here without the overtones of hysteria which usually accompany it on the screen. For once, too, Gregory Peck's impassivity serves him well. He speaks his lines with an unaccustomed conviction, and



GREGORY PECK
Walter Mitty in reverse

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit."

FAIR: "Land of the Pharaohs."

with his general look of troubled solemnity this all fits the part rather well. Tom Rath, in fact, is Walter Mitty in reverse—troubled by the reality of past violent action, anxious only to achieve a safe anonymity, worried by his wife's unconcealed dissatisfaction with him. Of course, things do work out well in the end for them both—and, as I have said, more creditably to them than in the original story—but I would have liked it more clearly emphasised that honesty was good in itself and not simply the best policy in a materialistic world.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit is, of course, far too long at 14,000 feet; I was numbed before it finished. One or two of the players—notably Fredric March and Marisa Pavan—perform really well; in contrast with Jennifer Jones, who emotes unbearably. But what piqued my interest most was the general contrast in quality between the flashback scenes of war and those devoted to what was variously described as the rat-race or the chromium jungle of commercial TV. Of the two, the war seemed more real and at times a lot more meaningful.

LAND OF THE PHAROHS

(Howard Hawks-Warner Bros.) G Cert.

NOTHING but the biggest and best seems to satisfy Howard Hawks, in names or backdrops, and it may surprise the cognoscenti to learn that William Faulkner figures in the credits of this extravaganza as one of the scriptwriters. I strongly suspect that his buddies, Harry Kuntz and Harold Jack Bloom, were responsible for most of the dialogue (some of which sorts oddly with a 2880 B.C. setting), but that didn't prevent a large audience of part-time Egyptologists having a cheerful evening's fun. *Land of the Pharaohs* is all about the reign of Khufu (Cheops to you), who nationalised the building industry and used it to construct the Great Pyramid. Khufu (Jack Hawkins), you see, was an acquisitive type, and since the Pharaohs were not among those who subscribed to the you-can't-take-it-with-you philosophy, he felt the need of some secure retreat where he could stash his bullion and his sarcophagus when the time came. To construct the pyramid he employed (according to Mr. Hawks—or Messrs. Faulkner and Co.) not only the entire Egyptian labour force, but a shrewd architect (James Robertson Justice), whom he had acquired as a p.o.w. Vastar is a sort of Mosaic character, who takes on the job provided that Pharaoh will let his people go when it's over, and not unnaturally it's a sort of mosaic pyramid he designs—one fitted with an ingenious self-sealing device which double-locks the entire 85,000,000 cubic feet of masonry more or less at the turn of an urn. This not only makes the pyramid about as safe a deposit as Fort Knox, but ensures that the scheming second wife of Khufu (Joan Collins) gets her deserts—or at least a sufficient area of them—in a super-colossal finale.

The Great Pyramid represents, I suppose, what can be achieved with cheap labour. Howard Hawks, who has hardly left one of its stones unturned (a good deal of the film was shot on location), left me with the same general impression. But don't imagine that it is all unintentional comedy. A lot of ingenuity has gone into the film, the colour is lively, and if the dialogue is generally bunk the magnitude of the show is enough to put de Mille on his mettle.

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