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Author(s)	Paul Speegle
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Out of the Desert--Great Film

"Lawrence of Arabia," the film which opened Thursday at the United Artists Theater, is an absolutely, unequivocally, indisputably brilliant example of the art of motion pictures.

It is the first long movie (it runs for some three hours and 20 minutes, plus an intermission for those who yearn for tasties and drinks) during which I hadn't the slightest idea of the passage of time. At this moment I would be hard pressed to single out one sequence, or several, which could have been left out of the picture without detriment to the flow of the narrative.



By
**PAUL
SPEEGLE**

Never has the staggering immensity of the deserts of the Middle East been so awesomely transferred to the screen. The photography is magnificent in its sweep and scope and although its beauty is a thing of grandeur its treachery is as smooth as its undulations—like the silken curves of a scheming woman.

BUT DIRECTOR David Lean has not allowed the panorama to overwhelm his sense of the fitness of things. He brings the vastness of nature down into narrower focus by his adroit handling of the actors who play out their characterizations against the backdrop of nature.

It is the story of **T. E. Lawrence**, the unmilitary British lieutenant who, through some mystical inner strength, was able to ingratiate himself into the fierce good graces of the Bedouin tribes of the trans-Jordanian desert and preserved British influence in that area during World War I by leading the Arabs against the Turks in several merciless campaigns.

The screen play was written by Robert Bolt, the gentleman responsible for one of Broadway's more towering dramatic successes, "A Man for All Seasons," and Mr. Bolt has done a remarkable job of encompassing the Lawrence career. The script bulges with action, but there is humor and pathos to temper the savagery of certain of the cinematic passages.

Director Lean was also immeasurably aided and abetted by the cast which producer Sam Spiegel gathered together for this epic. The title role is played by Peter O'Toole, a handsome Britisher, possessed of light blue eyes, thick blond hair and a talent for dramatic expression which makes his Lawrence a glittering portrayal of this man who had the capacity to make some of his military superiors livid with anger and instill a passionate loyalty in other men.

SOME OF THE SCENES in the British officers' club in Cairo are wonderfully amusing examples of the delicious humor of understatement, and when you have such performers as Jack Hawkins, Claude Rains and Anthony Quayle delivering the lines not a vocal inflection or quirk of the eyebrow is missed.

Alec Guinness plays the part of Prince Feisal, titular head of the several Arab tribes, and he is about as wily and shrewdly philosophical as an Arab, himself. A direct and striking contrast to his quiet, persuasive, sophisticated performance is that of Anthony Quinn as the flamboyant, egotistical, heavy-handed chief of a band of brigands. Mr. Quinn is about as subtle as a dyspeptic camel and twice as unpredictable. It is one of his better jobs.

As Sherif Ali Ibn el Kharish, the Arab leader most closely associated with Lawrence in his adventures against the Turks Omar Sharif is extremely effective, not only because he exudes the authenticity of the natives of the area but also because he's a darned good actor, and the perfect antithesis of the light-skinned Britisher.

And you will not soon forget the contribution made by Jose Ferrer, as the effete and disenchanted Turkish Bey. He appears only briefly, in an episode so crawling with homosexual sadism you're immensely relieved when it is over. And it is Mr. Ferrer's exquisite sense of timing which is responsible for the evil which permeates the scene.

Arthur Kennedy, too, makes his presence felt as the American correspondent, Jackson Bentley, assigned to get the story on Lawrence. It is a nicely drawn and essentially honest portrayal of a newspaperman—a welcome departure from the ridiculous caricatures which usually pass for members of the profession.

It is, I think, impertinent for anyone to claim, with certainty, that this or that picture will win an Academy Award, but I will be very much surprised if "Lawrence of Arabia" isn't named in some category or other. It is much too fine an industry achievement to be completely overlooked.

DOWN MEMORY LANE: The Samuel Stark collection of 30 years of English and American theatrical memorabilia will be placed on public display in the Gleeson Library of the University of San Francisco, starting Feb. 4. After exhibitions in other sections of the Bay Area the collection will be transported, in the fall, to Stanford, where it will become a permanent part of the archives of that institution.