Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* is recognized as one of the greatest films of all time for numerous reasons. The superb script, written by Julius Epstein, Phillip Epstein, and Howard Koch is the strongest part of the film, followed closely by the strong performances of Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart, among others. The film’s relevant themes and timely release helped it to achieve initial success, and the timelessness of its message and romance have allowed it to age better than perhaps any other film. All of these factors combined have allowed *Casablanca* to be not only an exceptionally well-received and well-known film, but also a piece of American history and popular culture. Despite all of this, *Casablanca* is nowhere near cinematic perfection. In fact, the film contains a few glaring plot holes, an uncharismatic Victor Laszlo and a script that was still being written after filming had started. In a strange way, these blunders are what makes *Casablanca* so enjoyable. If *Citizen Kane* is a strict, severe, and humorless scientist, *Casablanca* is a charming, carefree, and witty bartender. *Citizen Kane* may have done more for the development of cinema, and it may be more technically impressive, but *Casablanca* is just more fun. *Casablanca* may be flawed, but it’s just too charming for anyone to care about its flaws. After all, no one expected *Casablanca* to be so great, somehow, despite all of its flaws, *Casablanca* just works.

*Casablanca*’*s* script is the stitching that holds the film together. The film earned six spots on the American Film Institute’s 100 Greatest Movie Quotes of All Time, three more than any other film. The script was written somewhat haphazardly, the Epstein brothers and Koch never worked together in the same room or at the same time. Additionally, filming began before the script was finished. Despite all of this, the writing is consistently extraordinary. Although the most famous line from the film, “Here’s looking at you, kid” was included after Bogart used it in a comment to Bergman between takes, the other five lines can be credited solely to excellent writing. The writers may not have completed the script in the timeliest manner, but they were dedicated to the script nonetheless. Another of the famous lines “Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship”, sometimes considered the best last line of all time, wasn’t written until a month after shooting had ended. Humphrey Bogart was called back into the studio to record that single line, which vastly improved the ending of the film. This sort of dedication and attention to detail elevated this script above the rest.

The romance of Rick and Ilsa would not have been as enchanting without the dialogue created by the Epstein brothers. The iconic scene surrounding the line “Play it, Sam. Play ‘*As Time Goes By*’” would not be nearly as powerful without the scrupulous dialogue created by the Epsteins. Bergman and Bogart were able to achieve an impressive amount of chemistry through solid acting alone, but the witty, romantic, although sometimes cheesy dialogue between them greatly contributed to their charisma.

The initial success of the film was in part due to the cast. Bogart had just recently broken through to leading roles after years of playing supporting characters, so his name surely drew some attention to the film. Although Ingrid Bergman was not as well-known as Humphrey Bogart her eye-catching looks certainly helped to bring people into the theaters. The success of the film that can’t be attributed to the cast has to be attributed to the timing and relevance. *Casablanca* is a WWII movie released during WWII, but it doesn’t boldly flaunt its war-time themes. The film is anti-isolationist propaganda, released immediately after the U.S. decided not to be isolationist, due to Pearl Harbor. During this time many U.S. citizens were unsure about the transition from Isolationism to Interventionism, and *Casablanca* was there to reassure the public that isolationism could not and should not continue. Unlike other war films from the era *Casablanca* was relatively subtle about its message. It was clearly a war movie, but it was veiled with romance. The anti-isolationist message was clear, but not incredibly blatant. Movie-goers in this era had probably already seen their fair share of bold, painfully obvious propaganda pieces, and they respected *Casablanca’s* subtlety.

Another contributor to the initial success of *Casablanca* was its well-timed release, or releases. It was originally planned for release in early 1943, but was rushed to premier in New York City in November of 1942 to feed off of the publicity Casablanca, Morocco was receiving from the Allied invasion of North Africa. The film’s general release was in January of 1943, to draw on the publicity of the Casablanca Conference. These two publicity moves surely helped to increase awareness of the location of Casablanca and the bolster the significance of the city, as well as increasing intrigue about the film as a whole. With all of these things on its side, *Casablanca* was well received upon its initial release, but not extraordinarily so. The film’s budget was around $900,000, and it made $3.7 million in its initial release, making it only the seventh highest grossing film of 1943. This seems troubling considering that it is decidedly the most iconic film from its year, and arguably the most iconic of its decade. As some critics have stated, the film is less than flawless from a technical standpoint, containing several continuity errors and some fairly obvious plot holes. These mistakes, specifically the plot holes, may have hindered the film’s initial success.

What *Casablanca* lacks in initial success it makes up for in longevity. Its anti-isolationist message never fails to be relevant in a world where the U.S. is always being called upon for assistance and intervention in foreign affairs. Although the public opinion of interventionism might not be at an all-time high the modern viewer sees the film as a comment only on intervention in WWII, which was clearly necessary and positive. *Casablanca’*s love story is fantastic and the chemistry between Bogart and Bergman ranks them as one of the best and most iconic film couples of all time. The film’s romantic plot is the biggest part of what makes it so timeless, love never goes out of style.

The influence of *Casablanca* is more widespread than most people would recognize. Many Americans quote *Casablanca* without even knowing it, some of the quotes from the film have become so engrained in the American lexicon that people don’t even know their origin. Other influences are more central to the film world. Many films have been influenced by *Casablanca* including *The Usual Suspects* and *Play it again, Sam*, both being named after famous lines from the original film. *Casablanca* has also been parodied several times, and referenced heavily, most recently and notably in *La La Land.*

Despite its lasting impact, some would argue that *Casablanca* isn’t a great film, and they’re probably right. The film doesn’t do anything incredibly inventive or unique, the script is great but surely would have been better if had been finished before filming started. Humphrey Bogart’s portrayal of Rick was fantastic, but he’s a full two inches shorter than Ingrid Bergman. Victor Lazlo, and Paul Henreid’s portrayal of him, lacked any sort of charisma, and Lazlo had no chemistry with Ilsa. Curtiz’s direction lacks the style of more revered directors of the time such as Orson Welles or Alfred Hitchcock. And lastly, there are clear plot holes; why can Victor Lazlo, and enemy of the Third Reich, walk around in broad daylight in a city filled with Nazi’s? Why does Lazlo care about the letters of transit when he would definitely be shot, or at least arrested on sight if he tried to flee from a Nazi occupied Casablanca? There’s no reasonable answer to these questions besides: no one cares.

The blunders that make *Casablanca* a less than stellar film are what makes it such an enjoyable movie. Classic films from directors like Hitchcock and Welles can be hard for the average modern viewer to watch *because* they’re so stylized. Film styles change over the years, but Curtiz’s direction was simple and timeless, but still skillful. It’s accessible to viewers of all ages, across all decades.

*Casablanca’s* flaws may bother some film critics, but most viewers are not film critics. *Bogart* may have been shorter than Bergman, and most viewers would probably agree that he should be more attractive to convincingly play the love interest of the beautiful Ingrid Bergman. But Curtiz hid their height discrepancy and Bogart and Bergman showed such a connection on-screen that it erased all doubt of their feelings towards each other. Lazlo’s character wasn’t charismatic enough to fully understand why Ilsa would leave Rick for him in the first place. But everyone is rooting for Rick and Ilsa anyway, the viewers don’t care about the shortcomings of Lazlo’s character because they’re too focused on deciphering the troubled past of Rick and Ilsa and contemplating their future. The plot holes are likely apparent to the average viewer, but they’re dismissed by the overwhelming interest in the drama surrounding the Rick’s Café, the romance of Rick and Ilsa, and the fate of the revolution. Many of *Casablanca’s* mistakes go unnoticed, due to its excellence in other areas. Furthermore, some of the mistakes that are noticed managed to have a positive effect on the film. After all, even the producers of the film expected it to be nothing more than another decent movie, which perfectly sums up *Casablanca*: film’s greatest happy accident.

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