

The White Tower

by Emily Soares | June 26, 2009



The White Tower (1950) is a post-war movie ostensibly about a treacherous mountain climb, but more symbolically about the reorganization of the world in the wake of World War II and those looking for meaning in it.

Based on the book by novelist and mountain climber James Ramsey Ullman, **The White Tower** brings together an American GI (Glenn Ford), a disillusioned writer (Claude Rains), a British naturalist (Sir Cedric Hardwicke), a local guide (Oskar Homolka), a closet Nazi (Lloyd Bridges) and a local woman (Alida Valli from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Paradine Case*, 1947), daughter of a famous climber, who is determined to conquer the mountain where her father died. Each character has his or her own reason for climbing the White Tower and will confront their true nature in the mist and snow of its dangerous peaks.

Adjustment to the post-war climate and the emerging House UnAmerican Activities Committee hearings affected the production of the film itself. **The White Tower** was originally slated to be produced by Adrian Scott (*Murder, My Sweet*, 1944, *Crossfire*, 1947) and his directing partner Edward Dmytryk, but was handed over to Sid Rogell (*Blood on the Moon*, 1948) and Ted Tetzlaff (*Notorious*, 1946) when Scott and Dmytryk were blacklisted, becoming part of the "Hollywood Ten." Ullman's novel was adapted for the screen by Paul Jarrico (*Thousands Cheer*, 1943, *Song of Russia*, 1944), who would also be blacklisted shortly afterward.

Lloyd Bridges was also questioned by the HUAC for possible involvement in the Communist Party, but was cleared by the FBI and resumed his career. By the time he appeared as the unrepentant fascist in **The White Tower**, Bridges had already established himself in adventure movies. He made the successful transition to television and by 1958 was in one of the most popular TV series of that era - *Sea Hunt*.

Like the character he plays in **The White Tower**, Glenn Ford's life was interrupted by WWII. His successful career was put on hold during his military service and when he returned his career took off after he appeared in *Gilda* (1946) and continued to flourish during the '50s and '60s.

Alida Valli (she went by the single name "Valli" during her Hollywood years), was born in Pola, Italy - now Croatia. She was billed as the next Garbo, having made a name for herself in WWII Italy. In those early days of her European career, she briefly abandoned acting when she refused to appear in what she felt were Fascist propaganda films. After lukewarm success in the States, she returned to Europe in 1951, where she was much more successful in her film career, starring in such prestigious movies as Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954), Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Grido* (1957) and Georges Franju's *Les Yeux Sans Visage* (1960).

As for co-star Claude Rains, David J. Skal in his biography *An Actor's Voice: Claude Rains* wrote that **The White Tower** "has the rare distinction of being one of the few that resulted in a bad notice for Rains. Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* stated flatly, "Claude Rains, as a garrulous weakling, is something of a bore, and Sir Cedric Hardwicke, as another, is pathetic." Rains's primary memory of the uncomfortable location shoot was enduring near-frostbite and receiving full-body brandy rubdowns from a nurse."

Producer: Sid Rogell

Director: Ted Tetzlaff

Screenplay: Paul Jarrico; James Ramsey Ullman (novel)

Cinematography: Ray Rennahan

Art Direction: Ralph Berger, Albert S. D'Agostino

Music: Roy Webb

Film Editing: Samuel E. Beetley

Cast: Glenn Ford (Martin Ordway), Valli (Carla Alton), Claude Rains (Paul DeLambre), Oskar Homolka (Andreas), Cedric Hardwicke (Dr. Nicholas Radcliffe), Lloyd Bridges (Mr. Hein), June Clayworth (Mme. Astrid DeLambre), Lotte Stein (Frau Andreas), Fred Essler (Knubel), Edit Angold (Frau Knubel).

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