

LIFE Movie Club

Video Movie Options

Introduction

In these pandemic days, the LIFE Movie Club can't meet in person, but does have the option of screening movies online. Fortunately, LIFE's preferred video meeting platform – Zoom – provides a reasonable shared movie experience.

But LIFE isn't licensed to screen copyrighted movies. There is an option: the LIFE Movie Club could screen movies that, for one reason or another, have entered the public domain. Wikipedian provides a list of movies that are in the public domain: [List of films in the public domain in the United States](#).

There are a number of interesting movies on that list. To enjoyably screen a movie, the “print” needs to be of reasonable quality. That requirement narrows the list. What follows is an annotated list of movies in the public domain for which reasonably high quality copies have been found. Terry Poulton (poultonterry@gmail.com) is the LIFE Movie Club. Let her know your preferences.

Technical Stuff: There is little international legal consistency in determining when or whether a movie has entered the public domain. For the purposes of the LIFE Movie Club, we will consider screening any movie that has entered the public domain in the United States (or Canada). Real quality of a print could be difficult to determine. We'll use a simple criterion: the print needs to have at least 720 horizontal scan lines. One last point: All of the material that follows has been copied from the description found on Wikipedia (minus their reference numbers).

Possible Movies to Screen

A Farewell to Arms is a 1932 American pre-Code romance drama film directed by Frank Borzage and starring Helen Hayes, Gary Cooper, and Adolphe Menjou. Based on the 1929 semi-autobiographical novel *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, with a screenplay by Oliver H. P. Garrett and Benjamin Glazer, the film is about a tragic romantic love affair between an American ambulance driver and an English nurse in Italy during World War I. The film received Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Sound, and was nominated for Best Picture and Best Art Direction.

A Star Is Born is a 1937 American Technicolor romantic drama film produced by David O. Selznick, directed by William A. Wellman from a script by Wellman, Robert Carson, Dorothy Parker, and Alan Campbell, and starring Janet Gaynor (in her only Technicolor film) as an aspiring Hollywood actress, and Fredric March (in his Technicolor debut) as a fading movie star who helps launch her career. The supporting cast features Adolphe Menjou, May Robson, Andy Devine, Lionel Stander, and Owen Moore.

Algiers is a 1938 American drama film directed by John Cromwell and starring Charles Boyer, Sigrid Gurie, and Hedy Lamarr. Written by John Howard Lawson, the film is about a notorious French jewel thief hiding in the labyrinthine native quarter of Algiers known as the Casbah. Feeling imprisoned by his self-imposed exile, he is drawn out of hiding by a beautiful French tourist who reminds him of

happier times in Paris. The Walter Wanger production was a remake of the successful 1937 French film *Pépé le Moko*, which derived its plot from the Henri La Barthe novel of the same name.

And Then There Were None is a 1945 film adaptation of Agatha Christie's best-selling mystery fiction. *And Then There Were None* is directed by René Clair. The cast featured Barry Fitzgerald, Walter Huston, Louis Hayward, Roland Young, June Duprez, Mischa Auer, C. Aubrey Smith, Judith Anderson, Richard Haydn and Queenie Leonard as the people stranded on the island. The film won the Golden Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival.

Beat the Devil is a 1953 adventure comedy film. The film was directed by John Huston, and starred Humphrey Bogart, Jennifer Jones and Gina Lollobrigida, and featured Robert Morley, Peter Lorre and Bernard Lee. Huston and Truman Capote wrote the screenplay, loosely based upon the 1951 novel of the same name by British journalist Claud Cockburn, writing under the pseudonym James Helvick. Huston made the film as a sort of loose parody of the 1941 film *The Maltese Falcon*, which Huston directed and in which Bogart and Lorre appeared. Capote said, "John [Huston] and I decided to kid the story, to treat it as a parody. Instead of another *Maltese Falcon*, we turned it into a ... [spoof] on this type of film."

God's Little Acre is a 1958 American comedy-drama film of Erskine Caldwell's 1933 novel of the same name. It was directed by Anthony Mann and shot in black and white by cinematographer Ernest Haller. Although the film was not released until August 1958, its production schedule is indicated as September 11 to late October 1957. The film was as controversial as the novel, although unlike its source material it was not subjected to prosecution for obscenity.

His Girl Friday is a 1940 American screwball comedy drama romance film directed by Howard Hawks, starring Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell and featuring Ralph Bellamy and Gene Lockhart. It was released by Columbia Pictures. The plot centers on a newspaper editor named Walter Burns who is about to lose his ace reporter and ex-wife Hildy Johnson, newly engaged to another man. Burns suggests they cover one more story together, getting themselves entangled in the case of murderer Earl Williams as Burns desperately tries to win back his wife. The screenplay was adapted from the 1928 play *The Front Page* by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. This was the second time the play had been adapted for the screen, the first occasion being the 1931 film also called *The Front*

House on Haunted Hill is a 1959 American campy supernatural horror film directed by William Castle. The film was written by Robb White and stars Vincent Price and Carol Ohmart. Price plays an eccentric millionaire, Frederick Loren, who, along with his wife Annabelle, has invited five people to the house for a "haunted house" party. Whoever stays in the house for one night will earn \$10,000. As the night progresses, the guests are trapped within the house with an assortment of terrors. The film utilizes many props used in carnival haunted houses to generate fear and terror. The film is in the public domain.

It's a Wonderful Life is a 1946 American Christmas fantasy drama film produced and directed by Frank Capra, based on the short story and booklet *The Greatest Gift*, which Philip Van Doren Stern began to write in 1939 and published privately in 1943. The film stars James Stewart as George Bailey, a man who has given up his dreams in order to help others, and whose imminent suicide on Christmas Eve brings about the intervention of his guardian angel, Clarence Odbody (Henry Travers).

Life with Father is a 1947 Technicolor American comedy film adapted from the 1939 play of the same name, which was inspired by the autobiography of stockbroker and *The New Yorker* essayist, Clarence

Day. It tells the true story of Day and his family in the 1880s. He wants to be master of his house, but finds his wife and his children ignoring him, until they start making demands for him to change his own life. The story draws largely on the insistence by his wife that Clarence be baptized and Clarence's stubborn, sometimes ill-tempered nature. It stars William Powell and Irene Dunne as Clarence and his wife, supported by Elizabeth Taylor as a beautiful teenage girl with whom Clarence's oldest son becomes infatuated, along with Edmund Gwenn, ZaSu Pitts, Jimmy Lydon and Martin Milner.

Made for Each Other is a 1939 American romantic comedy film directed by John Cromwell, produced by David O. Selznick, and starring Carole Lombard, James Stewart, and Charles Coburn. Lombard and Stewart portray a couple who get married after only knowing each other for one day.[

Meet John Doe is a 1941 American comedy-drama film directed and produced by Frank Capra, and starring Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck. The film is about a "grassroots" political campaign created unwittingly by a newspaper columnist with the involvement of a hired homeless man and pursued by the paper's wealthy owner. It became a box office hit and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Story. It was ranked #49 in AFI's 100 Years ... 100 Cheers.

My Dear Secretary is a 1948 American comedy film directed by Charles Martin and starring Laraine Day, Kirk Douglas, Keenan Wynn, and Helen Walker. The supporting cast features Rudy Valee, Alan Mowbray and Irene Ryan. Successful novelist and playboy Owen Waterbury (Kirk Douglas) hires aspiring writer Stephanie 'Steve' Gaylord (Laraine Day) as his secretary; a dream come true for Steve[who admires Owen and his work.

My Man Godfrey is a 1936 American screwball comedy film directed by Gregory La Cava and starring William Powell and Carole Lombard, who had been briefly married years before appearing together in the film. The screenplay for My Man Godfrey was written by Morrie Ryskind, with uncredited contributions by La Cava, based on 1101 Park Avenue, a short novel by Eric S. Hatch. The story concerns a socialite who hires a derelict to be her family's butler, and then falls in love with him.

Night of the Living Dead is a 1968 American independent horror film written, directed, photographed and edited by George A. Romero, co-written by John Russo, and starring Duane Jones and Judith O'Dea. The story follows seven people who are trapped in a rural farmhouse in western Pennsylvania, which is under assault by an enlarging group of cannibalistic, undead corpses. The film was completed on a US\$114,000 budget and shot outside Pittsburgh, where it had its theatrical premiere on October 1, 1968. The film grossed US\$12 million domestically and US\$18 million internationally.

Of Human Bondage is a 1934 American pre-Code drama film directed by John Cromwell and is widely regarded by critics as the film that made Bette Davis a star. The screenplay by Lester Cohen is based on the 1915 novel *Of Human Bondage* by W. Somerset Maugham. Sensitive, club-footed artist Philip Carey is a Briton who has been studying painting in Paris for four years. His art teacher tells him his work lacks talent, so he returns to London to become a medical doctor, but his moodiness and chronic self-doubt make it difficult for him to keep up in his schoolwork.

One-Eyed Jacks is a 1961 American Technicolor Western film starring and directed by Marlon Brando; it was the only film he directed. It was originally planned to be directed by Stanley Kubrick from a screenplay by Sam Peckinpah, but studio disputes led to their replacement by Brando and Guy Trosper. Brando portrays the lead character Rio, and Karl Malden plays his partner, "Dad" Longworth. The supporting cast features Pina Pellicer, Katy Jurado, Ben Johnson and Slim Pickens. In 2018, the

film was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress.

Penny Serenade is a 1941 American melodrama film directed by George Stevens and starring Irene Dunne and Cary Grant as loving couple who must overcome adversity to keep their marriage and raise a child. Grant was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance. The film charts the meeting, courtship, and marriage of Julie Gardiner (Irene Dunne) and Roger Adams (Cary Grant) through the playing of popular songs relevant to each time period.

Royal Wedding is a 1951 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer musical comedy film starring Fred Astaire and Jane Powell, with music by Burton Lane and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner. The film was directed by Stanley Donen; it was his second film and the first he directed on his own. It was released as *Wedding Bells* in the United Kingdom. The story is set in London in 1947 at the time of the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Philip Mountbatten. Astaire and Powell play siblings in a song and dance duo, echoing the real-life theatrical relationship of Fred and Adele Astaire.

Santa Fe Trail is a 1940 American western film directed by Michael Curtiz and starring Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Raymond Massey, Ronald Reagan and Alan Hale. Written by Robert Buckner, the film is about the abolitionist John Brown and his campaign against slavery prior to the American Civil War. In a subplot, J. E. B. Stuart and George Armstrong Custer compete for the hand of Kit Carson Holliday. The film was one of the top-grossing films of the year, and the seventh Flynn–de Havilland collaboration. Its content has little relevance to the actual Santa Fe Trail.

Scarlet Street is a 1945 noir tragedy film directed by Fritz Lang. The screenplay concerns two criminals who take advantage of a middle-aged painter in order to steal his artwork. The film is based on the French novel *La Chienne* (literally *The Bitch*) by Georges de La Fouchardière [fr], that previously had been dramatized on stage by André Mouëzy-Éon, and cinematically as *La Chienne* (1931) by director Jean Renoir. The principal actors Edward G. Robinson, Joan Bennett and Dan Duryea had earlier appeared together in *The Woman in the Window* (1944), also directed by Fritz Lang. Local authorities in three cities banned *Scarlet Street* early in 1946 because of its dark plot and themes.

Suddenly is a 1954 American noir crime film directed by Lewis Allen with a screenplay written by Richard Sale. The drama stars Frank Sinatra and Sterling Hayden, and features James Gleason and Nancy Gates. The story concerns a small California town whose tranquility is shattered when the train of the president of the United States is scheduled to make a stop in the town, and a hired assassin and his henchmen take over a home that provides a perfect vantage point from which to assassinate the president.

The Front Page is a 1931 American pre-Code comedy-drama film directed by Lewis Milestone and starring Adolphe Menjou and Pat O'Brien. Based on a 1928 Broadway play of the same name by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, the film was produced by Howard Hughes, written by Bartlett Cormack and Charles Lederer, and distributed by United Artists. The supporting cast includes Mary Brian, George E. Stone, Matt Moore, Edward Everett Horton and Walter Catlett. At the 4th Academy Awards, the film was nominated for Best Picture, Milestone for Best Director, and Menjou for Best Actor.

The Last Time I Saw Paris is a 1954 Technicolor romantic drama made by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It is loosely based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story "Babylon Revisited." It was directed by Richard Brooks, produced by Jack Cummings and filmed on locations in Paris and the MGM backlot. The screenplay was by Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein and Richard Brooks. The film starred Elizabeth

Taylor and Van Johnson in his last role for MGM, with Walter Pidgeon, Donna Reed, Eva Gabor, Kurt Kaszner, George Dolenz, Sandy Descher, Odette, and (a then-unknown) Roger Moore in his Hollywood debut.

The Little Shop of Horrors is a 1960 American horror comedy film directed by Roger Corman. Written by Charles B. Griffith, the film is a farce about an inadequate florist's assistant who cultivates a plant that feeds on human blood. The film's concept is thought to be based on "Green Thoughts," a 1932 story by John Collier about a man-eating plant. Dennis McDougal suggests that Griffith may have been influenced by Arthur C. Clarke's 1956 sci-fi short story "The Reluctant Orchid".

The Man with the Golden Arm is a 1955 American drama film with elements of film noir, based on the novel of the same name by Nelson Algren. It recounts the story of a drug addict who gets clean while in prison, but struggles to stay that way in the outside world. Although the addictive drug is never identified in the film, according to the American Film Institute "most contemporary and modern sources assume that it is heroin", in contrast to Algren's book which named the drug as morphine. The film stars Frank Sinatra, Eleanor Parker, Kim Novak, Arnold Stang and Darren McGavin. It was adapted for the screen by Walter Newman, Lewis Meltzer and Ben Hecht (uncredited), and directed by Otto Preminger.

The Snows of Kilimanjaro is a 1952 American Technicolor film based on the 1936 short story of the same name by Ernest Hemingway. The film version of the short story was directed by Henry King, written by Casey Robinson, and starred Gregory Peck as Harry, Susan Hayward as Helen, and Ava Gardner as Cynthia Green (a character invented for the film). The film's ending does not mirror the story's ending.

The Southerner is a 1945 American drama film directed by Jean Renoir and based on the 1941 novel *Hold Autumn in Your Hand* by George Sessions Perry. The film received Oscar nominations for Best Director (the only Oscar nomination Renoir received), Original Music Score, and Sound. Renoir was named Best Director by the National Board of Review, which also named the film the third best of 1945. The film, now in the public domain, portrays the hardships of a poor family struggling to establish a cotton farm in Texas in the early 1940s.

The Stranger is a 1946 American film noir starring Edward G. Robinson, Loretta Young, and Orson Welles. It is Welles's third completed feature film as director and his first film noir, about a war crimes investigator tracking a high-ranking Nazi fugitive to a Connecticut town. It is the first Hollywood film to present documentary footage of the Holocaust. The original story by Victor Trivas was nominated for an Academy Award. The film entered the public domain when its copyright was not renewed.

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