



The Only Game in Town

Director: George Stevens

Production Company:

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Producer: Fred Kohlmar

Production Manager: Christian Ferry

2nd Unit Director: Robert Swink

Assistant Directors: Robert Doudell,

Jean-Michel Lacor

Screenplay and original play: Frank D. Gilroy

Director of Photography: Henri Decaë

Special Effects: L.B. Abbott, Art Cruickshank

Editors: John W. Holmes, William Sands, Pat Shade

Art Directors: Herman A. Blumenthal,

Auguste Capelier

Set Decorators: Walter M. Scott, Jerry Wunderlich

Costumes: Mia Fonssagrives, Vicki Tiel

Music Composed and Conducted by: Maurice Jarre

Sound: Jo de Bretagne, David Dockendorf

Unit Publicist: Alan Arnold *

Cast:

Elizabeth Taylor (*Fran Walker*)

Warren Beatty (*Joe Grady*)

Charles Braswell (*Thomas Lockwood*)

Hank Henry (*Tony*)

Olga Valéry (*woman with purple wig*)

USA 1970

113 mins

Digital 4K

* Uncredited

The screening on Tue 15 Apr will be introduced by season programmer Karina Longworth

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You Must Remember This Presents... "The Old Man Is Still Alive"

The Only Game in Town

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Perhaps because of its Las Vegas locale, George Stevens's *The Only Game in Town* improves as the stakes in its story are raised. Based on Frank D. Gilroy's superb play, the film opens shakily with a meet cute between Joe Grady (Warren Beatty), an impetuous piano player, and Fran Walker (Elizabeth Taylor), a vulnerable chorus girl past her prime. Beatty looks bored by some of the barbs that Gilroy's script requires him to enunciate. For one thing, Joe has the annoying habit of quoting both sides of a conversation: 'Why don't you come in?' 'Don't mind if I do.'

After Joe and Fran spend the night together in Fran's dingy apartment, however, we realise that this is no routine romantic comedy. On waking, they almost pass for young marrieds, as she offers him his choice of orange or pineapple juice and he moans about her supply of razor blades. Before long, Joe moves in, and we fear any more familiarity between these two will breed contempt – yet it turns out they aren't looking for excitement but solidity. Indeed, the most daring aspect of Stevens's portrayal of Joe and Fran is that their relationship isn't based on any sort of moony infatuation (though at one point Joe croons bars from 'Some Enchanted Evening' to Fran – an unlikely but touching moment). Instead, Fran offers motherly admonitions to Joe about his self-destructive gambling (he loses his savings at casinos more than once), while he recognises her care for him (a major episode concerns her hiding his money so that he doesn't bet with it again), even though he admits he could attract interest from other women. Taylor has never seemed so poignantly middle-aged, far more authentically 'discontent' than in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* four years earlier.

In the end, Joe convinces Fran to marry him after a sleepless night in which both contemplate life without the other – here, Stevens and cinematographer Henri Decaë succeed in evoking Las Vegas with the awful early-morning light streaming through the windows. True to form, Joe remains utilitarian in his reasons for wanting to get hitched, one of them being the embarrassment it will avoid when they register at hotels.

Peter Tonguette, *Sight and Sound*, August 2013

A contemporary review

With its closed set, its lengthy duologues, and the relentless opening and shutting of doors, *The Only Game in Town* frankly reveals its origins on the Broadway stage. Adapting his own play, Frank D. Gilroy has made routine concessions to 'opening out' the film, such as the scenes in the casino, and George Stevens includes one or two montage sequences to evoke the night life of Las Vegas – neon signs, coloured fountains, the bright lights of the gambling halls. But finally all these additions only serve to remind us that the centre is firmly studio-bound. Equally firmly old-fashioned, too, not only in the high-gloss finish of Henri Decaë's photography (punctuated by misty close-ups), but also in the story's cosy revelation that both chorus girl and gambler have hearts of gold, and that marriage is finally the 'only game in town'.

The film's formula would seem pretty outmoded if only one didn't feel that everyone concerned so thoroughly believed in it. Elizabeth Taylor and Warren

You Must Remember This Presents... "The Old Man Is Still Alive"

The Tiger of Eschnapur Der Tiger von Eschnapur
Tue 1 Apr 20:45; Sat 12 Apr 12:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

A Hole in the Head

Wed 2 Apr 20:40; Sat 5 Apr 15:00

The Indian Tomb Das indische Grabmal

Sat 5 Apr 20:30; Sat 12 Apr 15:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

Cheyenne Autumn

Wed 9 Apr 20:10; Sat 19 Apr 14:20 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Sat 12 Apr 17:30; Fri 18 Apr 14:00 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Red Line 7000 + intro

Mon 14 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 20:50

The Liberation of L.B. Jones

Tue 15 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 20 Apr 14:50

The Only Game in Town

Tue 15 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Fri 25 Apr 17:55

Frenzy

Wed 16 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 27 Apr 18:35

Such Good Friends

Thu 17 Apr 20:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Mon 21 Apr 13:45

True Grit

Fri 18 Apr 17:50 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 17:35

Rich and Famous

Sat 19 Apr 17:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Wed 30 Apr 20:40

Avanti!

Sun 20 Apr 14:40; Wed 23 Apr 20:15

Movie Movie

Sun 20 Apr 18:30; Mon 28 Apr 20:50

Under the Volcano

Mon 21 Apr 18:35; Tue 29 Apr 20:50

Beatty conduct their private sex war with obvious relish, alternately vindictive and sentimental, cynical and nostalgic, neither quite lowering their defences until the final scene. In some scenes, too, the translation to film is a clear advantage. As Fran tries to say goodbye to Joe over the phone, she is interrupted by Lockwood's voice, reminiscing banally through the open door of the bedroom; the cross-cutting of all three faces – Lockwood complaisant, Joe bewildered, Fran transfixed in doubt – intensifies our sense of her mental conflict. And earlier Lockwood's arrival at the empty flat is effectively cut into the scene of Fran and Joe's idyllic – if rather obtrusively process-shot – afternoon on the boat.

Even the gambling scenes emerge as more than embellishment, Stevens using the camera to record the sharp fluctuations of Joe's expression more than the dynamics of the game itself. It is the authenticity and solidly actor-based style of Stevens' direction that makes the film, however stagy and old-fashioned in parts, rather less a stereotype of its times than, say, Peter Yates' *John and Mary*, signalling its contemporariness with an attention to voguish peripheral detail.

The fact that the detail here is dramatic rather than ornamental rescues the film from the perilous brink of woman's magazine fiction. Elizabeth Taylor's chorus girl waddle accords nicely with the innocuous vulgarities of her apartment (garish gilt mirror, cheap china jugs). And Warren Beatty's wisecracking, boyish charm – something of a repeat *Mickey One* – is consistent with his impetuous gambling itch and his dependence on Fran. 'Can you imagine if they outlawed gambling, what a ghost town this place would be,' says Joe, setting the scene for Fran's attempt to reform his gambling habits. And if the bourgeois sophistry of the conclusion – forswearing the erratic thrills of the dice for the sublime hazard of marriage – seems in retrospect rather suspect, it is a measure of the actors' achievement that the final clinch and fadeout (no less) come over as more than a piece of wishful manoeuvring.

Nigel Andrews, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1970

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