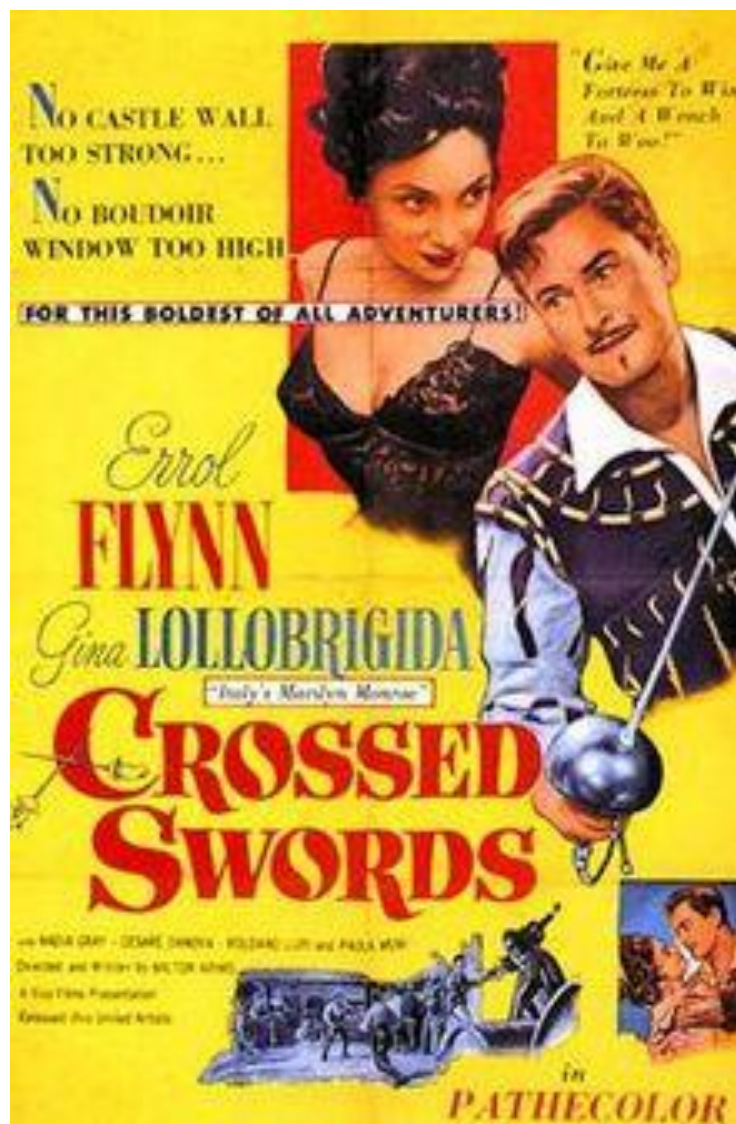


Crossed Swords



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Produced by Barry Mahon, Vittorio Vasarotti and Errol Flynn (uncredited). Directed and Written by Milton Krims. The Italian version and some of the English language version were directed by Vittorio Vasarotti. Cinematography by Jack Cardiff. Art Direction by Arrigo Equini. Original Music by Alessandro Cicognini. Edited by David Hawkins and Maria Rosada. Key Costumer: Nino Crisman.

Cinematic length: 86 minutes. Companies: Errol Flynn Productions, Mahon Vi-Va; American cinematic release: July 1954; DVD release 2010. Rating 70%.

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Cast

Errol Flynn as Renzo

Gina Lollobrigida as Francesca

Cesare Danova as Raniero

Nadia Gray as Fulvia

Roldano Lupi as Pavoncello

Pietro Tordi as The Duke

Alberto Rabagliati as Gennarelli

Paola Mori as Tomasina

Silvio Bagolini as Buio

Renato Chiantoni as Spiga

Riccardo Rioli as Lenzi

Review

Crossed Swords is a light-hearted, fast-paced, swashbuckling romp designed to showcase the talents of that prince of cinematic swashbucklers, the film's co-producer and major star, Errol Flynn. Despite some blemishes the filmmakers succeed in their task. Like the best swashbuckling movies, the pace never lags and there are several moments of light parody deftly placed into the narrative. The key word there must be moments. If swashbucklers can become ponderous without comedy, too many comic moments can weaken the adventure appeal. Likewise pacing: even the fastest paced adventure yarn needs slowing brakes - and breaks. Mentally an audience has to catch its breath in works of this genre. Fortunately writer/director Milton Krims and his editors do both tasks well.

Set in the Italian dukedom of Sidonia in the sixteenth century, Flynn serves as a mentor to the heir apparent, Raniero (Cesare Donova). However nobody, particularly his father, the reigning duke (Pietro Tordi) wants Flynn working in the role. Considering that mentor and student spend their time romancing women and then fleeing outraged male relatives or fighting them, the naysayers have a point. So does the ultimate object of his desire, Raniero's sister, Francesca (Gina Lollobrigida) who has many apt things to say about his maturity levels.



Like his acting in Crossed Swords this still from the film shows that the stories of Flynn being depressed, prematurely aged and in bad health from the later 1940s on are not the full story.

The duchy has two other problems: intriguers for power amongst both the duke's advisors and financiers and a declining population. In a wonderfully ridiculous scene the assembled citizenry hear of the solution: all males must marry and reproduce. The camera catches the blank, stunned faces of the people and when

fearful Flynn, allergic to marriage hears this he jumps out of the nearest window, pursued by a bevy of would-be brides. He spends frequent moments jumping out of windows to the extent that when one lady in waiting asks how to trap him, another tells her to lock him in a room with no windows. When he is jailed he looks at the window's bars, vexed.

Another good comic moment comes when the financier's wife Fulvia (Nadia Gray) smugly and gleefully considers assorted and outlandish execution weapons for the imprisoned Flynn, telling her wimpy husband that he does not have courage to be what he intends, the power behind the throne. He insists that he does: "I can be bloodthirsty with the best of them!" His repeated and naïve use of this phrase "the power behind the throne" in situations where his wife clearly works as the real power behind the throne (and the power behind him) make for some knowing humour.

The film has other strengths. Cinematographer Jack Cardiff's use of the then new colour process, Pathe, gives the film a scrumptious, delicate colour which matches old prints. Interiors, exteriors and costumes, both those that are bright and those that are more subtle, are also a visual feast. The authentic Italian settings also are a big plus with forests, castles and piazzas giving an authentic feel..The unobtrusive music perfectly matches the scenes. The sword fighting scenes are as fine as anything in Flynn's best films.

However negatives also come into play. In this reviewer's copy at least the sound quality frequently goes low or briefly muffles. Some of the minor players are merely reciting lines. At the other extreme some Italian cinematic actors frequently sound overly florid, even far too intense and that sometimes happens here.

The film should have done better at the box office and with critics than it did. Flynn said that end of the packaging process was badly handled, this was a frequent problem late in his career when film studios battled rising costs and falling revenues. Even so the commonly expressed idea that Flynn did nothing worthwhile after the 1940s is wrong, as this film clearly shows.

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