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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

Three months before his abdication, amid increasingly ominous events at home and the clash of armies on the Western Front, the Czar of all the Russias waited anxiously for the next episode of The Exploits of Elaine, in which the Clutching Hand pursued Pearl White reel after reel through the weekly instalments of that great movie serial thriller of almost three decades ago. On December 7, 1916, as his empire crumbled about him, he wrote from Army Headquarters to the Czarina:

"...The cinematograph was extremely interesting last night. We know at last who is the 'mysterious hand.' Her cousin and fiance, would you believe it? This caused tremendous excitement in the theatre." (From the official edition of the Romanoff Correspondence)

The Czar was not alone, however, in his enthusiasm for the Pearl White serial. All over the world, war or no war, people anxiously waited from week to week as each succeeding episode relieved the awful suspense of the preceding week, but plunged the heroine into fresh danger again.

New Yorkers will be able once more to refresh their memory of these ancient excitements when the Museum of Modern Art presents it Friday, January 23, for a ten-day period, as part of its Program 104: THE SERIAL FILM: 1915-1940, in the Museum's Cycle of 300 Films. The program will also include the 1938 movie serial of Buck Rogers, comic strip super-hero of the present generation who pilots space ships in inter-planetary wars, shoots deadly ray guns, and defies gravity with the greatest of ease and the noblest of motives. The Adventures of Red Ryder, another first-rate serial which today delights hundreds of thousands of little boys throughout the country, will be part of the same program, to be shown daily at 4 P.M. and Sundays at 2 and 4 P.M., from Friday, January 23, through Sunday, February 1.

Movie serials, like The Exploits of Elaine, are not easily found and restored to view today. Iris Barry, Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, had almost given up hope of finding a Pearl White film when, during a trip to Paris in 1938, she finally traced down the rumor of a print of The Exploits of Elaine in Brussels at a junk dealer's, but heard of it only when sailing for New York.

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A young Frenchman, however, agreed to go and procure it if his travelling expenses were paid. The Film Library furnished the money for this, plus 1000 francs to buy the print. Almost a year later it arrived in New York. It was a distinctly worn print, and there was considerable difficulty and delay in getting it into shape to make as good a dupe negative of it as possible. To confuse matters, the subtitles were in both French and Flemish.

Nowhere could the progress of movie-making be more sharply visible than in the contrast between this Exploits of Elaine and the up-to-date Buck Rogers and Red Ryder serials which form the piece de resistance of this program as the Museum's Cycle of 300 Films, tracing the history and development of the motion picture from 1895 to 1940, draws to its conclusion.

Two further programs conclude it - FILMS FOR LATIN AMERICA (daily February 2-7) and AMERICAN DEFENSE FILMS (daily February 8-14). On February 15, the Cycle of 300 Films will commence to roll again.