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Gone with the wind summary

Title page

Gone With the Wind is a story about civil war, starvation, rape, murder, heartbreak and slavery. It is not necessarily a book one would associate with hope. And yet, at the novel's heart lies Scarlett O'Hara, one of the most ruthlessly optimistic characters in literature.No moment illustrates Scarlett better than her return to Tara - the family home - after the collapse of Atlanta. She allows herself one night of lamenting all that has been lost, the next morning, she marches blindly into the future. "Scarlett was never to look back," as Margaret Mitchell puts it.Scarlett maintains this headstrong hopefulness as society collapses around her. She has a one-track mind, to the point of selfishness - she barely manages to fake interest in "the Cause", the southern US states' doomed stand against the Yankees. Everything beyond her circle is essentially irrelevant.Reading this novel in 2016, it is notable which characters survive and prosper in the new world. It is not the "good" characters who renew themselves from the disintegration of a civilisation; as Rhett Butler, Scarlett's eternal sparring partner, points out: "The nicest people in town are starving."Instead, it is the carpetbaggers and the speculators who thrive in the collapse of the south; the people who seize their moment, abandoning the past for the possibilities of the future. "There's good money in empire building," Rhett notes. "But there's more in empire wrecking." This is hope, but not hope for all.Mitchell carefully analyses the nature of human resilience, and holds up hopefulness as the critical tool for getting through the worst times. At one of the lowest points, Scarlett's neighbour, the elderly Grandma Fontaine, insists that Scarlett continues to hope. "We how to the inevitable," she tells Scarlett. "We're not wheat. We're not buckwheat. When a storm comes along it flattens ripe wheat because it's dry and can't bend with the wind. But ripe buckwheat's got sap and it bends. And when the wind has passed, it springs up, almost as straight and strong as before."But never - never - can Scarlett pause in this battle for survival. "Don't think you can lay down the load, ever," says Grandma. "Because you can't. I know."Paradoxically, hope is also Scarlett's Achilles heel. She clings on to the dream of her great unfulfilled love, Ashley, for years - wilfully ignoring any other course to happiness. Her focus on tomorrow constantly pushes good deeds into an indeterminate future. One day, she'll get around to teaching her son "his ABCs". One day, she fully intends to be a "great lady", mimicking the poise of her sainted mama. But she never quite gets round to it. Instead, Scarlett ensures that those close to her are dragged along in her wake. Even if the once-pampered beauty doesn't like most of her family, they will not be permitted to fall through the cracks.Is Gone With the Wind's nostalgia for slavery acceptable?In my family, Gone With the Wind is handed down from mother to daughter in the way other families pass down heirlooms. It is our survival guide. My mother tackles most problems with a "what would Scarlett do?" mindset - and even if the answer is "rip down the curtains, knock together a dress and get the hell on with it", that'll be what she does. Scarlett wouldn't bat an eyelash at anything from bad hair to bullying bosses - she would just calculate the best possible next move and go for it.But most of all, in the bleak days of 2016, it is Scarlett's belief that tomorrow will be better that feels endlessly and gleefully hopeful. After all, as she knows so well: "Tomorrow is another day." Getty Images For as much of a whirlwind that Gone with the Wind truly is, its production might have been even more intense. From the never-ending search for Scarlett, the ever-changing management and disgruntled actors, it seems short of a miracle that the film actually happened. And that famous kiss scene? Not so passionate (one word: dentures). Confounding script and scandal aside, there's just nothing better than Gone with the Wind — that's just a fact. 1 of 25 The film went through three directors before its completion. The original director, George Cukor, was fired 18 days into shooting and was quickly replaced by Victor Fleming (who'd also directed The Wizard of Oz). In the thick of production, Fleming allegedly experienced a mental breakdown, and after threatening to drive his car off a cliff, took time off. During the interim, Sam Wood took the reins until Fleming recovered from his exhaustion. The final tally? Cukor, 18 days, Fleming, 93 and Wood, 24. 2 of 25 Writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, and 15 others, took a stab at the screenplay. The original screenplay — gulp — was over six hours long. The final product was just under a modest four — cutting Margaret Mitchell's 1,000-page-long epic into a script, without sacrificing its vision was a Herculean feat managed predominantly by Sidney Howard, who died before the movie's premier. Later, writer Ben Hecht, producer Victor Selznick and Fleming shut themselves in a room for a week to finish the script — Selznick, thinking food inhibited the creative process, limited food supplies, and on the fifth day, while eating a banana, collapsed and was revived by a doctor. On the sixth day, a blood vessel in Fleming's eye burst. Fifteen other writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, took part in the cutting, editing and polishing of the script. Fitzgerald isn't mentioned in the credit reel — probably because his contributions (like most of his essayed screenwriting) weren't very successful. 3 of 25 Vivien Leigh almost lost the part of Scarlett after her first test reading. The English actress maintained her accent during her first reading — her enunciated, regal speech was a far cry from Scarlett's and nearly cost her the roll. 4 of 25 Scarlett audition tapes exist and they're oddly fascinating. Gone with the Wind had a slow start, partly since management couldn't decide on a Scarlett. Over 1,400 women auditioned for the role — watching these hopefuls take on the headstrong Southern woman might seem jarring (there's no one like Leigh!), but their interpretations are interesting at the very least. 5 of 25 At the time, the film was the third most expensive movie ever made. At \$3.5 million, Gone with the Wind was right up there with Ben Hur (\$4.5 million) and Hell's Angels (\$4 million). Today, that translates to around \$66 million, which is technically considered low-budget. You can boil a lot of the film's expenditures to its length — the final cut of the movie (originally half a million feet!) was about 20,000 feet long. 6 of 25 The movie's most iconic line almost didn't happen. It's hard to imagine Gone with the Wind without Rhett Butler's closing, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn." Hollywood's Motion Picture Association's Production Code, however, wanted producers to scratch it, suggesting, "My dear, frankly I don't care." instead. Blasphemy! Luckily, Selznick pressed the censors harder, citing the actual dictionary definition ("a vulgarism") as grounds that, frankly, it wasn't all that bad. 7 of 25 The day of the movie premier was a statewide holiday in Georgia. For the December 1939 premier at Loew's Grand Theatre, Georgia's governor had the National Guard on standby; inside the city, Atlanta's mayor declared a three-day holiday and even encouraged his constituents to dress up à la Scarlett and Rhett — hoop skirts, pantalets, tight trousers and all. 8 of 25 The black actors in the film, however, weren't allowed to attend. Segregation wouldn't end in the U.S. until 1954, which meant that, depending on the theater, many African American actors who starred in the film, including Hattie McDaniel (Mammy), Butterfly McQueen (Prissy), Oscar Polk (Pork) and Eddie Anderson (Uncle Peter), were barred from attending public premiers — for the theaters that weren't segregated, the producers discouraged black cast members from attending premiers, on the grounds that it was "unsafe." 9 of 25 And then McDaniel made history. At the 1940 Academy Awards, McDaniel broke down barriers when she became the first African American to ever win an Oscar. Even with the statue for Best Supporting Actress in her hands, though, McDaniel and her escort (exceptions to the Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel's "no-blacks policy") were reportedly forced to sit at a separate table it the back. 10 of 25 In fact, the film positively swept at the 12th Academy Awards. Nominated for 13 awards in 12 categories, Gone with the Wind took Best Picture, Best Actress (Leigh), Best Supporting Actress (McDaniel), Best Director (Fleming) and Best Screenplay (Sidney Howard, awarded posthumously) — and won five more on top of that. 11 of 25 Gable had an affair, got a divorce and eloped during production. Following his divorce from Texas socialite Maria Langham (which MGM Studios helped procure), Gable and his lover, Carole Lombard, eloped in Kingman, Arizona on a two-day break from filming. The reception? Sandwiches and coffee in the backseat of Gable's agent's car. 12 of 25 And Gable wasn't the only one. Leigh brought her fair share of scandal to set. The married (yep!) mother and actress was in the thick of an indiscreet love affair with Laurence Olivier, who was also married at the time. Following divorces from their spouses, the two wed in 1940, a year after Gone with the Wind premiered. Katharine Hepburn was one of the four people to attend the small Santa Barbara, California ceremony. 13 of 25 Setting "Atlanta" on fire required blazing 20 old movie sets. 14 of 25 Roughly half of the bodies in the train yard scene were dummies. To replicate the devastation of the Civil War, Selznick wanted the body count to show for it — at the time, though, the Screen Actors Guild had a limited number of extras available. As an addendum to the 950 actors, the producer ordered 1,000 dummies to fill in the Battle of Atlanta's dead and wounded; live actors manipulated the pretend ones to simulate writhing limbs. The trick worked. As the camera pans out on a stumbling Scarlett, more and more bodies fill the screen — with an aerial view of soldier's arms flailing and the sounds of moaning giving way to music, the train yard triage scene is as powerful as it is horrifying. 15 of 25 That monumental kissing scene wasn't as passionate as it looked. Man, you'd think that with a line like "You should be kissed, and often, and by someone who knows how," the kiss would be fire. Unfortunately Gable was dependent on dentures — he contracted a gum infection that cost him all his teeth in 1933 — and experienced bad breath as a side effect. "Kissing Clark Gable in Gone with the Wind was not that exciting," Leigh reportedly said of her costar. "His dentures smelled something awful." 16 of 25 Gable almost quit over crying on screen. Fearing that onscreen tears would typecast him as weak and overly-emotional, Gable threatened to walk out when directors told him to open the floodgates when learning of Scarlett's miscarriage (following that unfortunate fall down the stairs). Director Victor Fleming shot two scenes to appease Gable — one with crying and the other with Gable's back turned solemnly to the camera — but (obviously) went with the stronger, more vulnerable shot. 17 of 25 He hated making the movie entirely, actually. There's speculation that Gable had something to do with the firing of the original director, George Cukor, which sparked unrest on the set just days into filming. Gable thought Cukor was a "woman's director" and was concerned that he'd focus all attention on Leigh (as opposed to himself). Despite the fact that Rhett Butler became Gable's most famous role, he referred to the film as a "woman's picture." 18 of 25 Leslie Howard was in the same boat. Allegedly, Howard, then in his early 40s, only took the part of Ashley Wilkes (a strapping 21-year-old at the start of the film) because Selznick offered him a producing credit on a future project. "I hate the damn part," he reportedly wrote to his daughter. "I'm not nearly beautiful or young enough for Ashley, and it makes me sick being fixed up to look attractive." He didn't hold back on his criticism for the film (and Mitchell's novel!) either. "Terrible lot of nonsense — heaven help me if I ever read the book." 19 of 25 George Reeves, who played one of the Tarleton twins, went on to become Superman. His small role as Stuart Tarleton, one of the red-headed twins in love with Scarlett, was nothing compared to his stint as the iconic superhero. From 1951 to 1958, Reeves starred in the popular series The Adventures of Superman. 20 of 25 Scarlett's body double when she's being attacked by vagrants is a big guy. Stuntwomen weren't really a thing back in the 1930s — since the scene would have required Leigh to get seriously roughed up (and nearly thrown from a carriage), a man in her garb stepped in. If you look closely, you'll see that "her" waist is significantly thicker than Leigh's. 21 of 25 Tara Plantation was almost the centerpiece of an amusement park. Built in a California studio instead of Georgia, the fictional O'Hara family's estate sat in a set back lot until the 1950s, when Southern Attractions, Inc. purchased the façade. The set was deconstructed and shipped to Georgia with plans to rebuild it as the keystone piece of an amusement park. Unfortunately, that never happened — it was passed on to private owners and as far as we know, is currently deteriorating in storage. The front door, however, hangs in the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum in Atlanta. 22 of 25 Gable and McDaniel were friends and he loved to prank her on set. 23 of 25 Equal pay was absolutely not a thing. For 71 non-consecutive days of work, Gable received over \$120,000 for his performance as Rhett. Leigh worked nearly double (125 days!), but was paid only \$25,000. From a modern perspective, that's pretty tough to swallow, considering Leigh — let's be real — made this movie the tour de force it is. 24 of 25 The horses and carriages magically disappear as they approach Twelve Oaks. The façade of the Wilkes' plantation, Twelve Oaks, was actually a matte painting — which explains why the horse-drawn carriages seem to disappear into, rather than approach it. 25 of 25 Olivia De Havilland is the only member of the starring cast alive today. De Havilland played Melanie, Ashley's wife, in the film and went on to survive Leslie Howard, who died in 1943 and Gable and Leigh, who both died in the 1960s. On July 1, 2017, De Havilland celebrated her 101st birthday!

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