



# **In Capra's Shadow: The Life and Career of Screenwriter Robert Riskin**

*Ian Scott*

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Because screenwriter Robert Riskin spent most of his career collaborating with legendary Hollywood director Frank Capra, Riskin's own unique contributions to film have been largely overshadowed. With five Academy Award nominations to his credit for the monumental films *Lady for a Day*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *Here Comes the Groom*, and *It Happened One Night* (for which he won the Oscar), Riskin is often imitated but rarely equaled.

*In Capra's Shadow: The Life and Career of Screenwriter Robert Riskin* is the first detailed critical examination of the Hollywood pioneer's life and work. In addition to being one of the great screenwriters of the classic Hollywood era, Riskin was also a producer and director, founding his own film company and playing a crucial role in the foundation of the Screen Writers Guild. During World War II, Riskin was one of the major forces behind propaganda filmmaking. He worked in the Office of War Information and oversaw the distribution and later, production of films and documentaries in foreign theaters. He was interested in showing the rest of the world more than just an idealized version of America; he looked for films that emphasized the spiritual and cultural vibrancy within the U.S., making charity, faith, and generosity of spirit his propaganda tools. His efforts also laid the groundwork for a system of distribution channels that would result in the dominance of American cinema in Europe in the postwar years.

Riskin's postwar work included his production of the 1947 film *Magic Town*, the tale of a marketing executive who discovers the perfect American small town and uses it for polling. What Riskin created onscreen is not simply a community stuck in an antiquarian past; rather, the town of Grandview observes its own traditions while at the same time confronting the possibilities of the modern world and the challenges of postwar America. Author Ian Scott provides a unique perspective on Riskin and the ways in which his brilliant, pithy style was realized in Capra's enduring films. Riskin's impact on cinema extended far beyond these films as he helped spread Hollywood cinema abroad and articulated his vision of a changing America.

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