To Have and Have Not was a film developed without any grand aspirations or even particularly high expectations. It was churned out by Warner Brothers in hopes of cashing in on the formula that had made Casablanca successful two years earlier. During production, however, something very special emerged: the undeniable chemistry between stars Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. It was during the shooting of To Have and Have Not that the two first met and turned their on-screen passion into a full-fledged off-screen romance, perhaps the most legendary such love affair in all of American movie history. As we watch the sparks fly between the two in each and every scene, we’re observing the unfolding of a real-life romance: this was Bogey and Bacall falling in love before our eyes.

Of course, To Have and Have Not had other things going for it. In fact, the film has the distinction of being based on a book by a Nobel Prize-winning author, Ernest Hemingway, and co-written by another Nobel Prize-winning American novelist, William Faulkner. Not to mention, it was directed by the prolific auteur Howard Hawks. As legend has it, after Hawks boasted that he could make a movie out of any story, Hemingway bet Hawks he couldn’t make a decent movie out of one of the author’s worst books, and Hawks took him up on it, proposing To Have and Have Not.

Hawks apparently won the bet by changing the majority of Hemingway’s story, thanks to the efforts of screenwriters Jules Furthman and William Faulkner. (For a more faithful-to-the-source screen adaptation of the Hemingway original, see The Breaking Point, which was filmed in 1950.) Hawks first enlisted the aid of Faulkner, a lesser-known screenwriter whose history dated back to silent film and included such classics as Morocco, the original version of Mutiny on the Bounty, and The Way of All Flesh, to write a reasonably faithful adaptation and then Faulkner (who had not yet earned his own Pulitzer) to re-shape the script a bit for the screen. Although Hemingway’s name appears prominently on the title screen, which reads “Ernest Hemingway’s To Have and Have Not,” the film is a very loose adaptation and resembles something of the plot of Casablanca (1942) much more than the author’s original work.

Warner Brothers greenlit the resulting script precisely because of its comparable ingredients to those of their successful Casablanca: the world War II time frame, the exotic setting in the Caribbean (Martinique), the unmarried, cynical ex-patriate American anti-hero who is tough and politically apathetic— at first, the romantic love interest, anti-German/Vichy resistance fighters, the Vichy/Gestapo police captain, the cafe/bar and piano player. The movies even share cast members, including Bogart as well as Marcel Dalio as Frenchy, the owner of the hotel in To Have and Have Not and the croupier at Rick’s in Casablanca. Most of the action in the later film centers on the Hotel Marquis bar and cafe, which bears a close resemblance to “Rick’s Cafe American” in Casablanca. As for Bogart’s character, his neutral, uncommitted, “I don’t stick my neck out for anybody” attitude is central in both films. When his character is asked about his political sympathies in To Have and Have Not, he replies, “Minding my own business...I don’t need any advice about continuing to do it, either.” Loyal only to himself, he refuses to get involved in politics. We know, though, that when he is asked to help the French resistance, he can’t say no, despite his tough-guy façade and his claim the job was solely for monetary reasons.

In To Have and Have Not, Bogart plays a fisherman who rents his boat and his services to anyone with money, in turn attracting French resistance fighters seeking transport, while the sultry Bacall is a stranded young traveler who falls for him. The two call each other by nicknames, “Slim” and “Steve,” which were Hawk’s and his wife’s pet names for each other. Pure, straightforward sexual energy oozes from the screen from the moment Bogey’s character, Morgan, meets the young American, Marie Browning, as she simply asks, in her first lines to him, “Anybody got a match?” The one romantic scene between the two consists of the kind of sharp dialogue and sexual repartee that characterizes the entire film. Bacall’s sexy proposition halfway from leaving the room, those immortal lines, would go down in screen history: “You know you don’t have to act with me, Steve. You don’t have to say anything and you don’t have to do anything. Not a thing. Oh, maybe just whistle. You know how to whistle, don’t you, Steve? You just put your lips together - and blow.”

The script had originally allotted a smaller part for Bacall, but once her and Bogart’s chemistry became apparent, Hawks re-wrote page after page to bolster her role. This reduced Dolores Moran’s character, Helene de Bursac, who had initially been created as a secondary love interest for Bogart, to a small supporting role. As for the rest of the cast, for the piano player, Cricket, played by songwriter Hoagy Carmichael as he sings and plays the keys, sometimes with Bacall singing along as well. It is widely believed that Lauren Bacall’s singing voice was dubbed in by a pre-pubescent Andy Williams, but this is not true. Also of note is veteran character actor, Hawks regular, and three-time Oscar winner Walter Brennan, playing “older” as he did so often; he started acting in movies in his twenties and was only in his forties in this film, but his trademark voice seemed to lend itself to older roles. Brennan plays a good-hearted drunk who thinks he takes care of Bogart; really it’s the other way around, as Bogey’s unflattering loyalty to his pain-in-the-neck friend fulfills the male bonding theme that is commonly associated with Hawks’ films. To Have and Have Not employs many of Hawks’s favorite screen ingredients: a strong hero, a clueless sidekick, and a bold, sexually charged female (Bacall takes her place beside such leading ladies as Rita Hayworth in Only Angels Have Wings and Ann Sheridan in I Was a Male War Bride). A few scenes from To Have and Have Not even recur in the director’s other films, such as the classic, post-kiss line, “It’s even better when you help.”

—Jessica Singer