

# THE DARK PAGES

The Newsletter for Film Noir Lovers

Vol. 15, Number 2

“Special Supersized Issue!!”

March/April 2019

## Noir in Review: *Phantom Lady* (1944)

by Andy Wolverton

While at a local bar recovering from a spat with his wife, Scott Henderson (Alan Curtis) meets a mysterious lady (Fay Helm) whom he invites to share his tickets to the musical revue his wife apparently rejected. “No names, no addresses,” the woman tells him, “just a companion for the evening.” When the two part company after the show, Scott returns home to find the police waiting to give him some bad news: Scott’s wife has been murdered, strangled with one of his own neckties. When questioned, Scott swears he spent the evening with a woman whose name and address he doesn’t know. But she *did* wear a distinctive hat. And surely the bartender and their cab driver would remember her . . .

Arrested for murder, Scott has no one in his corner except his secretary, Carol “Kansas” Richman (Ella Raines), who decides to do some amateur sleuthing on her boss’s behalf. While the “wrong man” theme is common in film noir, director Robert Siodmak and cinematographer Woody Bredell create a visual framework that explores a dark world of deception and dread, elements that would become staples of film noir in the studio era and beyond.

*Phantom Lady* provides some nice visual touches early on, with shots of cigarette smoke rising and slow close-ups of characters’ faces, taking us inside a world dominated by fear, helplessness, and the ever-present anxiety produced by the recognition that time is running out. Siodmak and Bredell create several famous shots, including the wonderfully cavernous blackness of the prison visitors area, bathed in light from a high, barred window, as if the darkness is daring the illumination to even attempt to invade its murky world.

Siodmak and Bredell create further tension in both short and long bursts. During Scott’s trial, rather than visually capturing the court proceedings, Siodmak allows us to hear Scott respond to the prosecutor, but Bredell’s camera focuses on the court stenographer’s notes on a steno pad, symbols as indecipherable to most of the audience as Scott’s memories of the mysterious woman. A much longer, carefully constructed scene finds Kansas

seeking clues to her boss’s innocence at the bar where Scott and the mystery woman had drinks. Separated from everyone else at the bar, Raines is covered in light, a stark contrast from every other person as she stares at the bartender who claims he can’t remember seeing a woman with Scott on the night in question. The next evening, Kansas returns to the bar, this time clad in

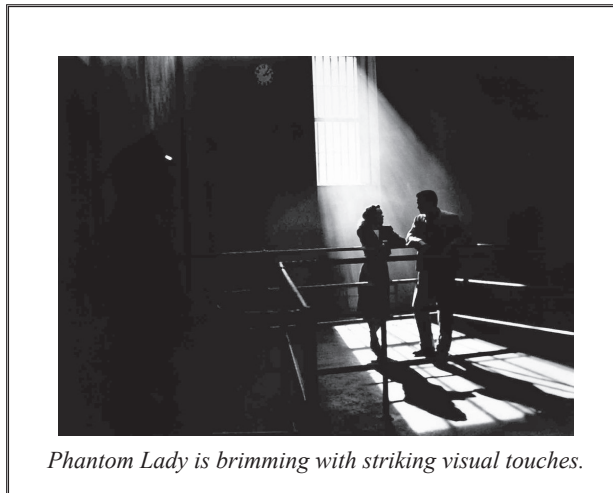
black and surrounded by others, but the bartender can’t escape from her gaze. The next night she’s back, resulting in one of the film’s best noir-soaked scenes.

Yet the film’s most famous moment features Kansas as she works to tempt information out of a drummer (Elisha Cook, Jr.) who may have a connection to the phantom lady. While jamming with a jazz combo, the drummer’s fervor feeds off Kansas’s increasingly seductive expressions, his frenzy made even more frantic from Bredell’s quick cuts and a wildly energized musical score. The combination of

Siodmak’s visuals borrowed from German Expressionism, the American idiom of jazz, and pure sexuality makes the scene unforgettable.

Siodmak’s *Phantom Lady* shares more than one connection to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954). Both are stories about an incapacitated man who relies on a woman to discover the truth behind a murder. Both films also originated from source material written by Cornell Woolrich (using pen name William Irish for his novel *Phantom Lady*). And although she didn’t work directly on *Rear Window*, Joan Harrison (who produced *Phantom Lady*) worked closely with Hitchcock as his longtime secretary and script assistant. Yet despite these similarities, Siodmak did not set out to make a Hitchcock imitation. He was developing his own style, one that would help define film noir during Hollywood’s classic era. With *Phantom Lady*, Siodmak was just beginning his masterful journey of leading audiences through the murky shadows and anxiety-filled darkness of film noir.

For all its successes, *Phantom Lady* shows some signs of weakness in its final act, especially in regards to the introduction



*Phantom Lady is brimming with striking visual touches.*

See *LADY*, continued on page 11

# What's New in Noir?

by Andy Wolverton

**Detour** (1945) Criterion Blu-ray, \$39.95; DVD, \$29.95

As all film noir fans already know, *Detour* is a legendary film. Part of that legend involves the story that it was filmed in six days (but was probably 14) with a budget of only \$20,000 (which was almost assuredly closer to \$100,000). But the real miracle here is the film's painstaking restoration, made possible by a process as complex as a large-scale heist. In fact, Blu-ray.com reviewer Dr. Svet Atanasov recommends that before watching the film, you should watch the disc extra titled "Restoring *Detour*," an 11-minute feature on the process and challenges of restoring the film.

For those unfamiliar with the story, check out page XX of this issue – the film is Kristina's TCM pick of the month. *Detour* has been written about and discussed for more than 70 years and the stories behind the scenes (especially that of star Tom Neal) are talked about with just as much verve as the film itself. Besides the aforementioned "Restoring *Detour*," the disc includes a 2004 documentary on the film's legendary director, *Edgar G. Ulmer: The Man Off-Screen* (66 min.), which includes interviews with Roger Corman, Joe Dante, Peter Bogdanovich, John Landis, Ann Savage, and more. You'll also be treated to a new interview with author Noah Isenberg (22 min.), a restoration trailer (2 min.), and a leaflet featuring an essay by poet Robert Polito. *Detour* is an absolute classic of film noir that you simply must own and this looks like an early candidate for one of the strongest film noir Blu-ray releases of the year.

**Noir Archive Volume I: 1944-1954** Kit Parker Films, 3 Blu-ray disc box set, \$49.95

Although these titles may not exactly strike you as high-profile films, the set includes names you're familiar with, including directors Budd Boetticher, Anthony Mann, Henry Levin, Ted Tetzlaff, Joseph M. Newman, Robert Parrish, and stars including Dana Andrews, Edmond O'Brien, Audrey Totter, Evelyn Keyes, Dorothy Malone, Rosalind Russell, Melvyn Douglas, Barry Sullivan, Adele Jergens, George Raft, Nina Foch, George Macready, Robert Cummings, Richard Basehart, Paul Lukas, Luther Adler, and many others. The complete list (with brief descriptions) is as follows:

**Address Unknown** (1944) William Cameron Menzies

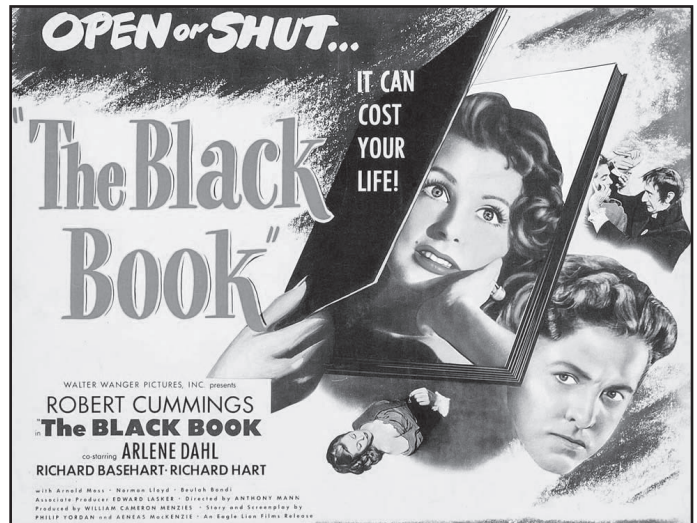
An art dealer (Paul Lukas) in America goes to visit his native Germany only to get pulled into Nazi propaganda, despite pleading letters from his friend back in the U.S.

**Escape in the Fog** (1945) Budd Boetticher

A nurse (Nina Foch) awakens from a nightmare in which a man is murdered, only to find him standing in front of her.

**The Guilt of Janet Ames** (1947) Henry Levin

Embittered by the death of her husband in WWII, a woman (Rosalind Russell) suspects one of her husband's comrades may have had a hand in his death.



**The Black Book** (aka *Reign of Terror*) (1949) Anthony Mann

This French Revolution action-packed costume drama contains mystery, betrayal, deceit, and a missing black book filled with death lists.

**Johnny Allegro** (1949) Ted Tetzlaff

Ex-gangster Johnny Allegro (George Raft) is asked to go undercover to infiltrate a crime ring led by the husband of Allegro's new acquaintance (Nina Foch).

See *NEW*, continued on page 9

The staff of *The Dark Pages* is head over heels about our theme for the 2019 GIANT issue!  
(Drum roll, please . . .)

## The Big Heat!

Character analyses? Scene dissection? Profiles of the stars? Trivia? Quotes?

You name it, and we'll be covering it!

Interested in contributing?

Write us at [thedarkpages@yahoo.com](mailto:thedarkpages@yahoo.com) or  
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and get on board!

## THE DARK PAGES

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# Deadly is the Screen

by Kristina Dijan

*Deadly is the Screen in May and June, where we find a familiar movie location, a former reporter who brought many stories to the screen, a hockey hall-of-famer, some not-so-confidential background and more . . . your guide to noirs showing on TCM in the next couple months.*

May 8

*Jeopardy* (1953)

*Border Incident* (1949)

*Borderline* (1950)

*Second Chance* (1953)

*His Kind of Woman* (1951)

*Out of the Past* (1947)

May 10

*The Unholy Wife* (1957). Writer Jonathan Latimer was a Chicago police reporter turned crime novelist. Three of his five “Crane” novels were adapted by Universal and starred Preston Foster as the lead detective. Latimer shifted into writing harder-boiled material with a novel about a religious cult, *Solomon’s Vineyard* aka *The Fifth Grave*, and was also screenwriting, with *The Lone Wolf Spy Hunt*, *Phantom Raiders* and *Topper Returns* among his credits. After WWII Navy service, Latimer returned to write at RKO and Paramount, where he worked on *Nocturne*, *The Big Clock*, *They Won’t Believe Me*, and others. *The Unholy Wife* and *The Whole Truth* were his last movie scripts, after which he returned to writing novels and TV scripts.

May 11 & 12

*White Heat* (1949)

May 12

*Mildred Pierce* (1945)

May 13

*The Hitch-hiker* (1953)

*The Lady from Shanghai* (1948)

May 14

*Murder, My Sweet* (1944)

*The Big Sleep* (1946)

*Lady in the Lake* (1947)

May 18 & 19

*Key Largo* (1948)

May 21

*The Man Who Cheated Himself* (1950). Fort Point, the fabulous historic location at the edge of San Francisco Bay where this film’s memorable climax takes place, can also be seen in *High Anxiety*, *Point Blank*, *Vertigo* (with some of the same angles), and *Foul Play*. In *Petulia* you get some especially nice views of that same lighthouse tower, and the long hallways of the Officers’ Quarters



*Tune in on May 21st to see Fort Point, the location at the edge of San Francisco Bay where the climax of *The Man Who Cheated Himself* takes place.*

that figure so prominently in *Man Who Cheated Himself*. The exit Lee Cobb takes to avoid the roadblock and drive into the Presidio, is the same spot Lauren Bacall’s character drives past in *Dark Passage*. The toll booth Cobb uses when he drives to ditch the murder gun is half gone now but enough of the Deco structure remains recognizable. The road near the Presidio and the airport location can also be seen in Don Siegel’s *The Lineup*. Source: [reelsf.com](http://reelsf.com)

May 21

*Scarlet Street* (1945)

*The Prowler* (1951) is Karen’s TCM pick for this issue.

*The Pitfall* (1948)

May 23

*Born to be Bad* (1950)

May 24

*Shadow on the Wall* (1950)

*The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

May 25 & 26

*Dead Reckoning* (1947)

May 29

*The Drowning Pool* (1975). One of the screenwriters is Tracy Keenan Wynn, grandson of Ed Wynn, son of Keenan, stepson of Van Johnson.

May 30

*The Big Sleep* (1946)

*See DEADLY, continued on page 4*



DEADLY, from page 3

June 1 & 2

*The Asphalt Jungle* (1950)

June 3

*Gilda* (1946)



Don't miss Gilda on June 3rd.

June 4

*The Night of the Hunter* (1955). Dorothy Patrick was born Dorothea Davis in St. Boniface, Manitoba, and modeled for catalogues and Canadian stores including Hudson's Bay. A talent contest win led her to an MGM contract; the same year she signed that she also married Lynn Patrick, NHL hall-of-famer, twice All-Star, Stanley Cup champion (with the New York Rangers) and later coach, manager and league executive. Dorothy and Lynn had a son Lester Lee, who died at age 40 after suffering a heart attack while driving home from a St. Louis Blues game.

June 5

*High Wall* (1947)

*Undercurrent* (1946)

*Johnny Eager* (1942). Edward Arnold was called an orange ranching "tycoon," thanks to his almost 50-acre grove in Southern California. He also ran as a Republican candidate for Los Angeles city alderman in the 1940s, but lost in a closely contested election. He was mentioned as a possible U.S. Senate candidate but instead, from 1947 to 1953, he played a different president each week on ABC's Radio show *Mr. President*.

June 7

*The Maltese Falcon* (1941)

*The Breaking Point* (1950)

June 9

*Nora Prentiss* (1947)

June 10

*Impact* (1949). When Ella Raines started in films, her first contract was with B-H Productions, a name made up of the initials of founding partners Charles Boyer and Howard Hawks. Raines was their only contract star when she joined in 1943.

*Hollow Triumph* (1948)

*The Stranger* (1946)

*Detour* (1945) is Kristina's TCM pick for this issue.

June 15

*Kansas City Confidential* (1952) In case there are any *Dark Pages* readers newer to noir and crime movies, or anyone who might not know what the "Confidential" means in this title, here's a brief and basic explainer. In 1948, the book *New York Confidential* was published, the first of a series of journalist exposes on the true state of municipal corruption and organized crime in America's biggest cities. The books – *U.S.A. Confidential*, *Washington Confidential*, *Chicago Confidential* and more – were bestsellers, a turning point in postwar depictions and examinations of urban decay and the ugly underbelly of power and politics. They triggered investigations and inspired movies familiar to noir and crime movie buffs, like *The Phenix City Story*, *The Captive City*, and *New Orleans After Dark*.

June 15 & 16

*Pickup on South Street* (1953)



You'll get two chances to catch Pickup on South Street – June 15th and 16th.

June 17

*The Glass Key* (1942)

June 22 & 23

*Shadow on the Wall* (1950). Olga the maid is played by Barbara Billingsley, and Dr. Canford the child psychologist is played by Nancy Davis, a couple of years before she married Ronald Reagan.

June 25

*The Las Vegas Story* (1952)

June 29 & 30

*On Dangerous Ground* (1952) ☎

# MITCHUM GOES SUSHI

by George H. Madison

Betrayal is a favorite word in noirland. Its antonym is loyalty. *The Yakuza* (1974) is an exceptional film that possesses an abundance of both principles. Although filmed in color, it remains a dark and brooding experience and is a film that will leave an indelible mark on the viewer who is paying attention.

*The Yakuza* is difficult to catalog, which may contribute to its neglect in America. However, it has achieved cult status in Europe. At its heart, the movie depicts an American-Japanese culture clash. Today both countries appear all too eager to embrace technology, but unlike America, Japan retains its steadfast devotion to tradition.

The Yakuza is an organization with deep roots in Japanese history, dating from the 17th century Tokugawa Shogunate. Although it superficially resembles the Mafia in America, *The Yakuza* is so much more than a Japanese gangster film.

The movie begins innocently enough. Greedy American businessman George Tanner (Brian Keith) has double-crossed a Yakuza crime family. Never a wise business decision. In retaliation, they kidnap his daughter. Tanner turns to his old friend Harry Kilmer (Robert Mitchum), a world-weary, retired man of diverse talents who lives in a California beach house. Both men served together in post-WWII occupied Japan 20 years prior, and Mitchum's special Japanese contacts are considered essential to avoid the logistical problems inherent in a rescue mission abroad. To assist him, Tanner sends his personal bodyguard, Dusty (Richard Jordan).

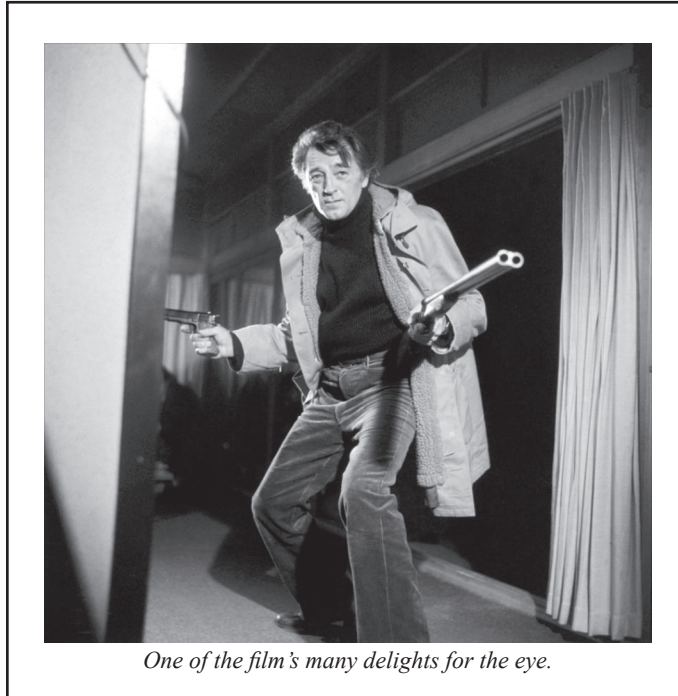
The rescue is relatively simple, but its aftermath is the essence of the movie. Things go seriously wrong. Nothing is as it seems. The relationships are complex and Tanner's version of the original business transaction is flawed. What follows is fantastic and must be seen. I'll tell you no more.

Kudos to Robert Mitchum and Takakura Ken, who own the movie. They are outstanding and dominate *The Yakuza* by their bigger than life onscreen presence. Fifty-seven-year-old Mitchum is resplendent in a fantastic camel hair overcoat, large enough to cover a Volkswagen, and Takakura, the Japanese Clint Eastwood, is lean, stoic and a deadly force. He exudes authority and strength.

Mitchum (1917-1997) was an actor who seemed to improve with age. His growing weariness afforded him an opportunity for

a subtlety that hadn't existed in earlier films. Director Sydney Pollack reports that some of Mitchum's lethargic movement in the climactic action sequence was real. He was tired.

For *The Yakuza* to work, we must believe in Mitchum's capacity for love and devotion to duty as a man who straddles two cultures. He is convincing in his Japanese-like nobility, especially when he says, "I have destroyed his past and his future." This sentiment gives rise to his sense of obligation and need for redemption. It is Mitchum at his best.



One of the film's many delights for the eye.

Takakura Ken (1931-2012) is not a familiar name to most American audiences, despite his having appeared in close to 200 films in Japan, where he was known as "the man who never smiles." Ken was a college graduate, sang a little and enjoyed a career that spanned from the 1950s to 2012. His most notable U.S. film was Ridley Scott's *Black Rain* (1989).

In *The Yakuza*, Ken plays a critical role as a magnificent cultural relic, a warrior whose code obligates him to Mitchum. Ken is honor bound to repay his debt regardless of the consequences. He is wonderful as a man who is tormented by his sense of conflicting loyalties.

On screen, he is Mitchum's equal. They never resort to cheap tricks or attention-getting mannerisms in an effort to compete. Instead, they are content to share their scenes together.

There are so many visual delights. One of the most memorable is the sight of Mitchum armed with a huge shotgun and a big boy revolver, and Ken brandishing his elegant Sunday-go-to-massacre sword as they enter a den of hostile Yakuza. It raises expectations and what follows does not disappoint.

Many of the supporting cast are worthy of praise. Keiko Kishi (born in 1932) is credible as Mitchum's mature Japanese romantic interest, a woman he continues to love after 20 years. James Shigeta (1929-2014) enjoyed a long career in American cinema and TV. Here, he is fine as Ken's brother and head of the Yakuza families. Pollack initially sought to cast a Japanese actor in the role, but the language demands proved an insurmountable barrier. Pollack didn't have to look far, in that Shigeta was his real-life next door neighbor in California, and he had proven his noirish ability in Sam Fuller's *The Crimson Kimono* (1959). Brian Keith (1924-1997) is good in a brief but pivotal role.

See *SUSHI*, continued on page 8



# Kristina's TCM Pick: *Detour* (1945)

by Kristina Dijan

With this Poverty Row masterpiece, there's no need for any "noir or not" debate. *Detour* is one of the most brutal, fatalistic, haunting and purest examples of the genre/style/era, with a quintessential noir plot that finds a flawed but somewhat decent person at a moral crossroads, where he makes a horrible choice that leads to ruination.



*Detour* is one of the purest examples of noir that you can find.

We first meet this unlucky man, Al Roberts (Tom Neal), at the tail end of his downward spiral, stewing in his misery at a diner; he's tortured, grimy and detached from fellow humans, rudely rebuffing friendly chitchat, and triggered by a jukebox tune that neatly summarizes his insecurities and reminds him of the time his whole mess began.

And so we flash back, across the country to New York, where Al's nimble fingers tickle the ivories and his chanteuse girlfriend announces she's breaking up their small-time nightclub act to go try her luck in Hollywood . . . without him. He eventually follows, but the only way he can afford to get across the country is to hitchhike.

When Al's flashy blowhard ride Charlie Haskell (Edmund MacDonald) dies suddenly, in an odd and easily misinterpreted way, Al assumes he'll look like a murderer, ditches the body, steals the car, and pretends to be Haskell. Al is so guilt-ridden and paranoid that every look, innocent question and knock on a motel door affects him like an accusation, and every tune sounds like a dirge.

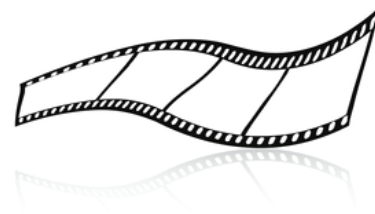
It comes to light that Haskell was himself a chiseler and man of many secrets; it strikes Al as slight justification not to mention ironic, since Haskell was a salesman of hymnals – not the first or last deceptive character in this story. Next, Al has the bad luck to pick up Vera (Ann Savage), a surly woman of few words, but just enough of them to tell Al she's on to his impostor act and plans to milk him good. "Just remember who's boss around here," she says. She keeps Al prisoner, tries to seduce him, threatens him with exposure, blackmails him into a looney inheritance scam,

and generally is such a wicked sneering pest that when she dies in a grisly twist (of the phone cord), Al's as relieved as he is doomed by more surreal circumstances.

*Detour* documents Al's nightmare, how his life is wrecked by wrong moves rooted in his troubled personality, his tendency toward skepticism, self-pity and selfishness. "Fate sticks out a foot to trip you" is Al's famous quote summing up noir forces and most of *Detour*'s events. He has some colossally bad luck, crossing paths with a rotten witch who preys and terrorizes, who takes out her misery on him and aims to drag him into the "same gutter." Her knowledge of his sin and guilt is her power and control. The closer he gets to his goal, his love and his dream, the further they're yanked away, leaving Al in limbo, wondering what life might have been if Haskell's car hadn't stopped for him.



There's a wonderful, must-read, in-depth essay on *Detour*, its source material, meanings and making, by Robert Polito at [criterion.com](http://criterion.com), a piece also included in the recently released, beautifully restored Criterion disc of the movie. Polito goes through the history of, and changes to, the story, as it was adapted from a treatment written by Martin Goldsmith, from his novel. One big element dropped was a parallel plot tracking what Al's girlfriend gets up to in Hollywood, and she goes through a lot; her scummy producers and casting couch activity were nixed so as "not to reflect discredit on the Motion Picture Industry." The essay further details how the project was shaped into the lean, seedy, memorable final product, and how much of Al is actually director Edgar Ulmer, who "detoured" from highbrow culture to Poverty Row. Take this dark, nasty *Detour* on TCM June 10. 📞



# Karen's TCM Pick: *The Prowler* (1951)

by Karen Burroughs Hannsberry

For my money, *The Prowler* – released in 1951 and starring Evelyn Keyes and Van Heflin – is one of noir's most underrated features. That's why it was a no-brainer to select it for my recommended TCM pick of the month.

## The plot:

Susan Gilvray (Keyes), lonely wife of a nighttime radio personality, calls the cops after she spies a prowler outside of her window. One of the officers who answers the call is (love this name!) Webb Garwood (Van Heflin), who makes no secret of his instant attraction to the distressed damsel. Webb's interest is piqued when he learns that said damsel just happens to be from the same area in Indiana from which he hails. (It's a small world after all!) And the fact that she's "happily" married doesn't seem to matter – to either of them, as it turns out. But when Webb comes up with a foolproof plan to snag the girl of his dreams, it turns out to be a nightmare for all concerned – and that's just the first half of the movie!



Webb Garwood: Conscientious cop or creepy prowler?

## Favorite scene:

It's brief, but it's one of the steamiest scenes I can think of in all of film noir. After being rebuffed by Susan during a previous visit, Webb returns to her home to apologize for his brutish behavior. With little opposition, Webb is soon talking Susan into sharing a dance, during which he offers up a hypothetical, "what if" supposition, founded on the premise that they could have met at a school dance years earlier. Holding Susan in an embrace that is equally gentle, firm, and passion-filled, Webb murmurs in her ear what could have happened: "I'd have asked you your name and you'd have told me. I'd have told you how swell you danced. How pretty you were." Before long, Webb is slowly, deliberately moving in for a kiss, and Susan is begging him – oh, so halfheartedly – to stop. And when the camera moves from the couple to the radio across the room – well, need I say more?

## Favorite quotes:

"If I was happily married to a girl like you, I wouldn't leave you alone nights." Webb Garwood (Van Heflin)

"You're a real cop, aren't you? You want everything free." Susan Gilvray (Evelyn Keyes)

## Other stuff:

The film was produced, according to the credits, by S.P. Eagle – who is actually Sam Spiegel, a close friend of John Huston's who teamed with the director to create the independent film production company, Horizon Pictures. (The company would go on to produce such classics as *The African Queen*, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, and *Lawrence of Arabia*.) Spiegel was married for several years to actress Lynn Baggett (you can read about this tragic dark corner performer in the March/April 2012 of *The Dark Pages*).

At the time *The Prowler* was filmed, star Evelyn Keyes was married to famed director John Huston.



Novelist James Ellroy included *The Prowler* in his list of 10 favorite crime movies, and described it as a "masterpiece of sexual creepiness." In one of the extras on the DVD (a fascinating "making of" featurette that also includes commentary by my pal, author Alan Rode), Ellroy calls Van Heflin "the biggest perv in film noir history." (Har!)

The radio announcer was voiced by blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo. Trumbo wrote the screenplay for the film, but used the name of a friend – Hugo Butler – as a front.

The film was directed by Joseph Losey who, also that year, was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Rather than appear before the committee, Losey sought exile in Great Britain and continued working under the name Joseph Walton.

The assistant director on the film was Robert Aldrich, who went on to helm the noir features *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and *The Big Knife* (1955), and a variety of other films including *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), *Hush*, *Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964), *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), and *The Longest Yard* (1974).

*The Prowler* airs on TCM on May 21st. Take a tip from me and don't miss it! ☎



More than an ornamental relationship exists between Dusty and Hanako, Kishi's daughter; it's a romance destined to suffer a noir fate. Richard Jordan (1937-1993) was a Harvard graduate and the grandson of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Learned Hand. Christina Kokubo (1950-2007) was a Japanese-American actress and like Jordan, she had a mid-level career in film and TV. Tragically, both coincidentally died at age 56, she from breast cancer and he from a brain tumor. Now, that's carrying noir too far.



The creative engine is Sydney Pollack (1934-2008). He was a pro-boxer and an actor before becoming a successful director. Pollack was a popular Hollywood personality; an entertaining guest at many a Hollywood soiree where he would often play the piano. He is best known for his non-noirs *The Way We Were* (1973), *Tootsie* (1982) and *Out of Africa* (1985).

*The Yakuza* is not mainstream Pollack; instead, it is a labor of love. He acted as co-producer and director, filming most of the movie in Japan to achieve authenticity and a balance in styles. He was enamored with Robert Frost's notion of promises to keep, and the film is about three people who love each other and refuse to accommodate the changing morality of the times. Despite the obstacles, they remain true to their values. Pollack became fascinated with the uniqueness of the Japanese culture, even embracing the relevance of the upper body tattoo art worn by the Yakuza. Reportedly, it took three hours a day to apply Ken's.

Pollack assembled a gifted writing team. The initial story was by Leonard Schrader. He then turned to two of Hollywood's finest screenwriters to produce the script. Paul Schrader (born in 1946), Leonard's brother, subsequently wrote *Taxi Driver* (1976)

and *Raging Bull* (1980). Well educated, he found a drug habit in L.A. and, allegedly, lost it in Japan. The other screenwriter was the celebrated Robert Towne (born in 1934) who also penned *Chinatown* (1974) and was an uncredited contributor to *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Parallax View* (1974). Impressive pedigrees that inspire confidence in Pollack's sincere efforts to produce a special film.

The final dramatic confrontation is technically brilliant, choreographed like a Fred Astaire dance number. It is beautifully staged violence, if such a thing can be said to exist. Japanese photographer Kozo Okozaki (1919-2005) and his techies manage to accomplish the carnage with precision, minimizing the gore and mayhem, while maximizing the tension. Surveying the resultant wreckage of the battleground is an unbelievable yet believable sight.

Dave Grusin's musical score is effective if you discount the nightclub vocal. Aside from Mitchum's camel hair coat, disregard the dreadful 1970s American fashions. Even back then I refused to dress the clown.

Pollack employs a plot twist to explain the sometimes puzzling behavior of the three main characters. Secrets are revealed that deal with honor and tradition. *The Yakuza* is different in its handling of rules and contradictions. It occupies its own niche in noir filmdom. Of the setting, one character observes: "You won't recognize it, but it's still Japan." That nation's continued cultural acceptance of obligation and humanity is unfamiliar to many Americans. With the passage of time, perhaps they are just as obsolete to today's Japanese as Mitchum's Pan American flight back to Los Angeles. Think about it. ☎

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### Tagline of the Issue:

"The story of a love that became the most fearful thing that ever happened to a woman!" -- *Laura* (1944)





NEW, from page 2

**711 Ocean Drive** (1950) Joseph M. Newman  
Edmond O'Brien plays a telephone repairman who believes his extensive knowledge in technology could bring down a powerful crime syndicate, leaving all the profits for himself.

**The Killer That Stalked New York** (1950) Earl McEvoy

A diamond smuggler (Evelyn Keyes) enters the U.S., unknowingly carrying a deadly contagious disease.

**Assignment - Paris!** (1952) Robert Parrish, Phil Karlson (uncredited)

Dana Andrews plays a New York reporter who finds himself in a lot of trouble in Budapest after discovering some dangerous microfilm.

**The Miami Story** (1954) Fred F. Sears

Miami crime boss Tony Brill (Luther Adler) faces Mick Flagg (Barry Sullivan), an ex-gangster seeking revenge for a murder rap.

Most of these films are Columbia Pictures releases (although *The Black Book* was originally a Universal film) and most have had previous lower-quality releases on DVD or DVD-R, so this release is quite exciting. It consists of three Blu-ray discs; I assume we'll get three films per disc. The only other information we've been given is that the films will be in HD and in their original aspect ratios, which usually means it's *not* a 2K or 4K scan. I would be *very* surprised if the set includes any supplements whatsoever, but regardless, this is a very welcome set and even at full price, this is a great deal. And more good news: a second volume with nine more movies is scheduled for July!

**Phantom Lady** (1944) Arrow Blu-ray, \$39.95

See this issue's cover story for a review of this film.

**The Public Defender: The Official First Season** (TV, 1954) ClassicFlix 3 DVD set, \$39.95

*The Public Defender* may not be strictly film noir, but it certainly could be of interest to noir fans. The series aired for one-and-a-half seasons on CBS in 1954-55 and starred Reed Hadley, known primarily as an actor and narrator in many film noir titles. Hadley's character, Bart Matthews, is said public defender, working tirelessly on behalf of indigent clients. Some of the characters Matthews encounters (not necessarily clients) are played by such actors as Steve Brodie, Charles Bronson, James Gleason, Richard Jaeckel, Kenneth Tobey, Marie Windsor, and many others. ClassicFlix does great work and I hope this set sells well enough for them to release more classic noir-stained TV shows.

**The Reckless Moment** (1949) Indicator Blu-ray (UK, Region Free), £16.99 (around \$22)

Lucia Harper (Joan Bennett) isn't exactly excited about her teenage daughter Bea (Geraldine Brooks) seeing a middle-



aged man named Ted Darby (Shepperd Strudwick), but when Darby accidentally dies on the Harper's property, Lucia decides to hide the body to avoid scandal. Ah, but people are always watching, especially blackmailers like Martin Donnelly (James Mason), who has come into the possession of Bea's love letters to Darby. Directed by Max Ophüls, *The Reckless Moment* is filled with style, tension, and excellent performances. Extras include "Making an American Movie" (2010), a 44-minute feature with analysis by Lutz Bacher, artist and author of *Max Ophüls in the Hollywood Studios*; "Maternal Overdrive" (2006, 22 min.), with director Todd Haynes discussing the film; "James Mason as Homme Fatal" (2018, 27 min.), an illustrated lecture by academic Adrian Garvey, recorded as part of the *Focus on James Mason* event at Birkbeck, University of London; "Focus on James Mason: Audience Discussion" from

the same event (40 min.); "James Mason: Watching the Violence Unfold" (2018, 33 min.), an illustrated lecture by academic Sarah Thomas, also recorded at Birkbeck; an isolated music and effects track; an image gallery; a limited edition 36-page booklet with a new essay by Samm Deighan; an introduction to Max Ophüls by critic Andrew Sarris; archival articles by Ophüls; an overview of contemporary critical responses; and film credits. Whew! This Indicator release is a region-free disc, which is great news.

**The Snake Pit** (1948) Twilight Time Blu-ray, \$29.95

Anatole Litvak's *The Snake Pit* begins with two women conversing on a park bench. They could be any women anywhere, but they're not. Virginia Cunningham (Olivia de Havilland) is confused, not realizing where she is. When she rises from the bench, things move at an alarmingly fast pace with visual clues building upon each other so quickly you probably won't realize you're holding your breath. A nurse walks among a group of women, barking orders at them as if she's been doing this for years (and perhaps she has). There's a marvelous 180° turn of the camera from one end of a long line of women to the other, a dizzying moment in which Virginia realizes she's trapped in a mental institution.

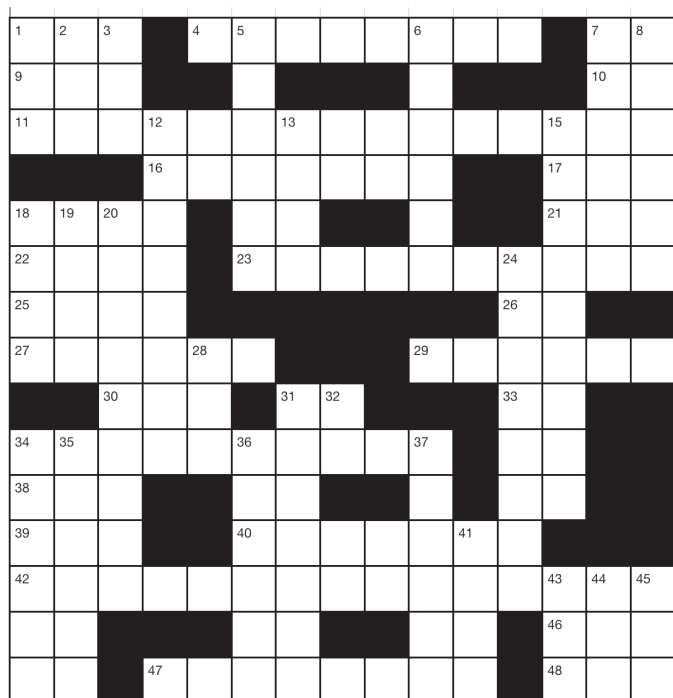
Capitalizing on such a powerful opening is difficult, but Virginia's story is so compelling (as is de Havilland's performance) we can't look away. We learn how Virginia got there, why she doesn't recognize her own husband (Mark Stevens), and wonder how in the world this will all get straightened out. Or will it? *The Snake Pit* was one of the first Hollywood films to take a serious look at mental illness and it still packs quite a punch today. You should probably think of it as a noir-stained drama, but I think any noir fan will want to own the film. Extras include an isolated music track, an audio commentary with film historian Aubrey Solomon, Fox Movietone newsreels, two Vintage Radio productions of *The Snake Pit*, and an original theatrical trailer.

See NEW, continued on page 11

# Puzzle Noir

by Kristina Dijan

Try your hand at this month's noir crossword puzzle! Answers on page 12.



## ACROSS

1. New Deal president
4. Strange, like "The Lipstick Killer"
7. Initials of *Gilligan's Island's* Ginger
9. Play about Capote
10. *D.O.A.* star's initials
11. Movie about a "Big" star and her screenwriter
16. Lively, like Hugo Haas might play in *Strange Fascination*
17. Initials of 42 across star
18. G-men, T-men, etc.
21. Mao \_\_\_\_-Tung
22. French way to spell Syrian city
23. 1952 noir about a playwright marrying an actor
25. "Soap" family name
26. Hospital trauma centre and TV series
27. Verdugo and others
29. *The Blue Dahlia*, *Macao*, *The Big Steal* actor
30. CBS' forensic franchise
31. Initials of *Dark Waters* and *Berlin Express* actress
33. Initials of George Burns's better half
34. *Stranger on the Third Floor*, *The Verdict* actor

38. "A fool such \_\_\_\_"

39. 2003 award-winning climbing documentary, init.

40. Geographical levelling off

42. Nicholas Ray's directorial debut

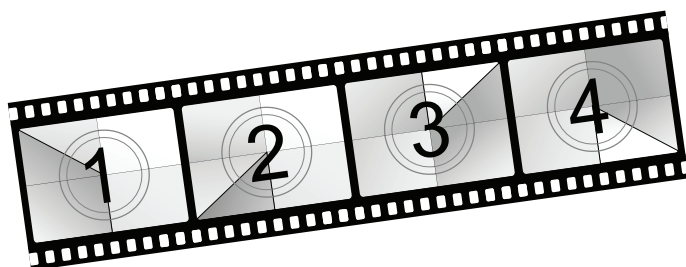
46. *Look Back in Anger* actress Mary

47. Borzage 1948 noir about a young man with daddy issues

48. Edward Everett Horton's nickname

## DOWN

1. Sumter and Knox, abbrev.
2. *711 Ocean Drive* actress
3. *Woman on the \_\_\_\_*
5. Belonging to actress Davis
6. *The Big Sleep* bookshop clerk
7. *Steel Trap*, *Restless Years* actress Wright
8. Jack Palance and Laird Cregar played this
12. Ice skating features prominently in this 1946 noir
13. One of Lloyd Bridges' sons
15. Neo-noir from a 1955 Thompson novel, \_\_\_\_ *My Sweet*
18. "\_\_\_\_ sticks out a foot to trip you."
19. Israeli airline
20. Job of McPherson, Vargas, Spade, Hammer...
24. This ancient Chinese art of harmonic placement might have helped some noir characters
28. Tire filler
31. Moving day vehicle, full of gangster's girlfriends
32. *Bullets \_\_\_\_ Ballots*
34. George C. Scott's famous role
35. The Story of \_\_\_\_ Costello
36. *On Dangerous Ground* actress
37. When Dorothy's aunt looks closely at something
41. *Riffraff* actress
43. It can be Quick, For Hire, or Crazy
44. Charlemagne's domain
45. \_\_\_\_ de Corsia





**Someone to Watch Over Me** (1987) Shout Select Blu-ray, \$34.93

Stepping out of an elevator after an art show and after-party, Claire Gregory (Mimi Rogers) witnesses a murder. This isn't just any murder victim, but one of Claire's closest friends Winn (Mark Moses), who sponsored the art show she just attended. Claire evades the killer, but he's gotten a good look at her. Mike Keegan (Tom Berenger), a newly appointed NYPD detective, is assigned to protect Claire, but he gets a little too close, which doesn't sit too well with Keegan's wife Ellie (Lorraine Bracco). This noirish police thriller from Ridley Scott (his fifth film) generally receives mixed reviews, but Scott's visual style and a good cast make this worth your consideration. The only extras include new interviews with writer Howard Franklin and director of photography Steven Poster.

**Torment** (aka *Paper Gallows*) (1950) Juno Films DVD, \$19.95

Here's a story of two brothers (Dermot Walsh, John Bentley), both writers of crime novels, and both in love with the same woman, their shared stenographer/secretary (Rona Anderson). One brother is normal and law-abiding, the other a psycho. A faked crime goes horribly wrong, resulting in . . . well, torment. This British thriller is the second film directed by John Guillermin (*The Blue Max*, *The Towering Inferno*, *King Kong* [1976], *Death on the Nile*). Juno Films appears to be a fairly new company taking on some very interesting projects. As far as I can tell, the DVD contains no extras.

See NEW, continued on page 12



*Implausible, but not a deal-breaker.*

of Scott's best friend Jack Marlow (Franchot Tone) and the ending's implausibility. Yet these elements are far from deal-breakers. Siodmak's first true film noir is clearly a winner every noir fan should own. Although the Arrow Academy Blu-ray package offers little information about the transfer other than "transferred from original film elements," both video and audio elements are good, a step up from the 2012 TCM DVD release.

The new release includes a 52-minute film from 1994 called *Dark and Deadly: 50 Years of Film Noir*, which includes clips and brief examinations of film noir from the classic era and the 1990s, with almost nothing in between. The appearances from those who worked in the classic era (Robert Wise, Edward Dmytryk, cinematographer John Alton) are far more interesting than those working in the then-current year of 1994. While the more modern filmmakers (Bryan Singer, Dennis Hopper, John Dahl, James Foley) recognize their debt to and appreciation of classic film noir, their insights pale in comparison to those of the 1940s and 1950s (the exception being Carl Franklin, who makes some truly fascinating comments and connections).

Other extras include a 1944 Lux Radio Theater radio broadcast of *Phantom Lady*, starring Alan Curtis and Ella Raines, an image gallery, and a booklet featuring a 2018 essay from film noir expert Alan K. Rode titled "The Making of *Phantom Lady*: Film Noir in the Starting Blocks." 📖

"We used to talk about the criminal type. Criminal type, my eye. It's not how a man looks, it's how his mind works that makes him a killer."

-- *Phantom Lady* (1944)

## TRIVIA TIDBITS

Compiled by Karen Burroughs Hannsberry

A Dark Pages issue without trivia is like an alley without shadows . . .



Lana Turner and Spangler Arlington Brugh

- Robert Taylor's given name was Spangler Arlington Brugh.
- Adele Jergens entered and won a contest at the 1939 World's Fair, earning the title "Miss World's Fairest."
- Lee J. Cobb was studying to be a concert violinist, but his plans for a musical career ended when he shattered his wrist in a fall at the age of 17, just before he was going to debut at Carnegie Hall.
- While working as a showgirl in Earl Carroll's extravaganza at the Aquarius Theatre in L.A., Yvonne DeCarlo violated her contract by accepting a bit part in the Ladd-Lake vehicle, *This Gun for Hire*. When Carroll discovered DeCarlo wearing motion picture makeup, he fired her on the spot.
- Cathy O'Donnell was directed by William Wyler in her first ➤ film, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), and her last, *Ben Hur* (1959). Incidentally, O'Donnell was married to Wyler's brother, Robert.
- After graduating from Lake Forest College in Illinois, Richard Widmark worked for two years as a college professor, teaching speech and drama.
- Jean Peters was completing the requirements for a degree in education, when a friend submitted her picture to the Miss Ohio State Contest. She wound up the winner – her prize was \$200 and a trip to Hollywood for a screen test at 20th Century-Fox. A short time later, she signed a contract with the studio.
- It's said that Orson Welles was a musical virtuoso by the age of three, an expert magician by four, sat up nightly reading Balzac at the age of eight, and played *King Lear* before he was 10.

- George Raft made a living for several years as a dancer, entering and winning ballroom dance contests, working as a taxi dancer in New York cafes, touring with the Orpheum and B.F. Keith vaudeville circuits, and appearing as the featured dancer at Texas Guinan's El Fey Club. ☎

NEW, from page 11

**Wanda** (1970) Criterion Blu-ray, \$39.95; DVD, \$29.95

Wanda (Barbara Loden) is a hard-luck character who's lost everything. She's left her husband, lost custody of her kids, and has become a drifter, hanging out with one awful man after another, all of whom mistreat her. The latest man in her life is a criminal who entices her to help him with his next crime. *Wanda* may not have the look of a traditional film noir, but its protagonist is firmly in the middle of some deep, dark noir.

Loden wrote, directed, and starred in this, her only film, and it is stunning. The Criterion release comes from a new 2K restoration made possible by the UCLA Film & Television Archive, The Film Foundation, and Gucci. Extras include an hour-long documentary by Katja Raganelli called *I Am Wanda* (including a 1980 interview with Loden), an audio recording of Loden speaking to students at the AFI in 1971, a segment of her appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show* in 1971, a short educational film called "The Frontier Experience" starring and directed by Loden, a trailer, and an essay by film critic Amy Taubin. ☎

Answers to Puzzle Noir, from page 10.

F	D	R		A	B	N	O	R	M	A	L		T	L
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