



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Man Hunt

Adapted – somewhat loosely – by Dudley Nichols from Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Mail*, Fritz Lang's thriller, set on the eve of WWII, centres on a big-game hunter (Pidgeon) arrested by the Gestapo after he takes a 'practice shot' at Hitler. Escaping to England, he himself is hunted by various sinister agents. Arthur Miller provides the crisp expressionist camerawork; one scene in the Underground is a tour de force.

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'Somewhere in Germany, shortly before the war', British big-game hunter Alan Thorndike (Walter Pidgeon) locates a scenic ridge in the mountains that allows him to frame Adolf Hitler, brooding on an adjacent balcony, in the crosshairs of his unloaded rifle. He squeezes off an imaginary shot, just for the thrill of it... then decides, on the spur of the moment, to load his weapon and really do the deed.

It isn't until we reach the other end of Fritz Lang's *Man Hunt* that Thorndike, an avowed pacifist who no longer kills the animals he hunts, finally understands what motivated this fateful change of heart – but in the meantime he is caught, arrested and interrogated by monocled Gestapo man Quive-Smith (George Sanders), himself a strutting gamesman who recognises his illustrious prisoner by sight. He offers to set Thorndike free if he'll sign a document stating that he was sent to Germany as an assassin by the British government – which is untrue, and which he refuses to do. Subsequently beaten and pushed off the same ridge to his presumed death, Thorndike survives and stows aboard a Danish freighter also carrying a sinister passage-paying Nazi (John Carradine, even more menacing than he was as 'Baron Latos' in *House of Dracula*) who has claimed Thorndike's identity and passport.

Back in a London generously peppered with bit players from Universal's *Sherlock Holmes* series, Thorndike finds his homeland equally lousy with Nazis and spies, marauding as everything from taxi drivers to little old ladies, as Quive-Smith taunts his every fugitive step by telephone. Thorndike is saved from near-capture when he fortuitously bumps into Cockney seamstress Jerry Stokes (Joan Bennett, in the first of four films as Lang's star and muse), a rewritten prostitute whose arrival heralds comedic contrast with Thorndike's staid upper-crust acquaintances, a whiff of sentimental romance and the opportunity for patriotic tragedy.

Based on the popular 1939 novel *Rogue Male* by Geoffrey Household (which sprang from a story published in the *Atlantic Monthly*) and inherited from John Ford as he busied himself with *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Man Hunt* was Fritz Lang's sixth American film and the picture that reconsecrated a devotion to paranoid thrillers which would carry him through his next eight pictures and beyond. Set before Britain declared war on Hitler's Germany in September 1939 and released six months before the US entered the fray after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Man Hunt* not only despises the Third Reich but also takes a quietly contemptuous stance towards America's own reluctance to declare itself Hitler's enemy, mirrored back at the American moviegoer by the

narrative's depiction of Britain's reticence (permissible criticism in light of a Neutrality Act forbidding US films of the time to endorse Britain's war involvement). The closing shot, which depicts a British airdrop of armed soldiers over Germany, is brazenly scored with 'America the Beautiful', an ingenious circumvention of such 'endorsement'.

Though not one of Lang's best films, *Man Hunt* is worth seeing as a catalogue of cinematic invention, as well as a keen-eyed political statement. The first 17 minutes alone are a remarkable demonstration of how to sustain interest against the grain. We open with a long, disembodied tracking shot through a studio wood, incorporating two easily overlooked dissolves that may well condense what was once a still more extended shot, taking its sweet time to introduce the human element; after Thorndike's capture, the film continues on for a full eight minutes before the first word of English is spoken; and following Thorndike's beating, he is dragged into Quive-Smith's presence for a scene in which George Sanders is the only actor shown in a room full of other men's silhouettes. The film's highlight, aside from the sweet business between Bennett and Pidgeon, is a suspenseful sequence of Thorndike being stalked by the cane-dagger-wielding Carradine through the tunnel of a magnificent London Underground station set.

There are some important grace notes, such as the farewell kiss that Thorndike subtly blows to Jerry on the bridge where they last meet, or the fact that Lang frames it with the hero's back turned to camera, thus giving the moment tender sentimentality without making Hollywood's usual vulgar meal of it. Lang pulls this punch more than once in the scenes involving these two characters, and his refusal to parade or burlesque what is sacred between them is key to this uneven film's nagging, undismisable quality.

**Tim Lucas, *Sight & Sound*, March 2010**

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#### MAN HUNT

Director: Fritz Lang

©: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Executive Producer: Darryl F. Zanuck \*

Associate Producer: Kenneth Macgowan

Associate Producer: Len Hammond \*

Unit Manager: Ben Silvey \*

Production Manager: William Koenig \*

Assistant Director: Ad Schaumer \*

Screenplay: Dudley Nichols

Contributing Writer: Lamar Trotti \*

Based on the novel 'Rogue Male' by: Geoffrey Household

Director of Photography: Arthur Miller

Special Effects: Fred Sersen \*

Editor: Allen McNeil

Art Directors: Richard Day, Wiard B. Ihnen

Set Decorator: Thomas Little

Subway Construction Supervisor: William Kelley \*

Costumes: Travis Banton

Music: Alfred Newman

Sound: Eugene Grossman, Roger Heman

Technical Advisers: William Farquhar, Howard Batt \*

Joan Bennett's Dialect Coach: Queenie Leonard \*

#### Cast

Walter Pidgeon (*Captain Alan Thorndike*)

Joan Bennett (*Jerry Stokes*)

George Sanders (*Major Quive-Smith*)

John Carradine (*Mr Jones*)

Roddy McDowall (*Vaner*)

Ludwig Stössel (*doctor*)

Heather Thatcher (*Lady Alice Risborough*)

Frederick Worlock (*Lord Gerald Risborough*)

Roger Imhof (*Captain Jensen*)

Egon Brecher (*Whiskers, the jeweller*)

Lester Matthews (*RAF Major*)

Holmes Herbert (*Saul Farnsworthy*)

Eily Malyon (*postmistress*)

Arno Frey (*police lieutenant*)

Fredrik Vogeding (*ambassador*)

Lucien Prival (*umbrella man*)

Herbert Evans (*Reeves, the Risborough butler*)

Keith Hitchcock (*bobby*)

Carl Ekberg (*Adolf Hitler*) \*

William Haade (*2nd SS man*) \*

Otto Reichow (*sentry*) \*

Bob Stephenson (*Eckner*) \*

Kurt Kreuger (*German embassy attaché*) \*

Walter Bonn, Carl Ottmar (*harbour policemen*) \*

William von Brincken (*harbour police chief*) \*

Sven Hugo Borg (*first mate*) \*

John Rogers (*Cockney*) \*

Clifford Severn (*Cockney boy*) \*

Adolph Edgar Licho (*little fat man*) \*

Olaf Hytten (*Pixel, Farnsworthy's secretary*) \*

Virginia McDowall (*postmistress's daughter*) \*

Bruce Lester (*co-pilot*) \*

Richard Fraser (*navigator*) \*

Adolph Milar (*pigeon man*) \*

Hans Joby (*tracker*) \*

Cyril Delevanti, Frank Benson (*cabbies*) \*

Douglas Gerrard (*policeman*) \*

Charles Bennett, Bobby Hale (*costermongers*) \*

USA 1941

105 mins

\* Uncredited

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## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### The Killers

Tue 25 May 20:30; Tue 8 Jun 14:30; Wed 23 Jun 17:50  
(+ pre-recorded intro by Imogen Sara Smith, author of  
'In Lonely Places: Film Noir beyond the City')

### Alice in the Cities (Alice in den Städten)

Wed 26 May 17:50; Tue 1 Jun 14:30; Fri 25 Jun 20:45

### Eraserhead

Thu 27 May 18:20; Mon 14 Jun 21:00; Thu 24 Jun 21:10

### Man Hunt

Fri 28 May 18:10; Sat 12 Jun 16:00; Tue 29 Jun 14:15

### Persona

Fri 28 May 21:00; Wed 2 Jun 18:10 (+ pre-recorded intro by  
Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Mon 28 Jun 21:00

### La Haine

Sat 29 May 21:00; Wed 16 Jun 21:00; Fri 18 Jun 20:40

**Citizen Kane** Sun 30 May 12:40; Mon 21 Jun 20:45

### Touch of Evil

Mon 31 May 12:45; Sat 5 Jun 17:50; Sun 20 Jun 18:15

### The Last Picture Show (Director's Cut)

Mon 31 May 12:50; Mon 7 Jun 17:45

**Steamboat Bill, Jr.** Thu 3 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:30

### Sweet Smell of Success

Fri 4 Jun 15:00; Sun 13 Jun 15:45; Sat 26 Jun 11:40

### The Man Who Wasn't There

Fri 4 Jun 17:50; Sun 27 Jun 18:20

### L'eclisse (The Eclipse)

Sat 5 Jun 12:10; Tue 15 Jun 17:50

### The White Ribbon (Das weisse Band)

Sun 6 Jun 18:10; Sat 26 Jun 16:30

**Le Doulos** + pre-recorded intro by Professor Ginette Vincendeau,  
King's College London

Mon 7 Jun 14:15; Thu 17 Jun 20:45; Wed 30 Jun 17:45

### The Night of the Hunter

Tue 8 Jun 20:50; Wed 16 Jun 18:15 (+ pre-recorded intro by  
Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

### The Tango Lesson

Wed 9 Jun 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by So Mayer, author of  
'The Cinema of Sally Potter')

### Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)

Thu 10 Jun 21:00; Mon 21 Jun 14:30

### Bitter Victory

Sun 20 Jun 13:00; Mon 28 Jun 17:55

### The Big City (Mahanagar)

Wed 23 Jun 17:40

### The Gospel According to Matthew (Il vangelo secondo Matteo)

Thu 24 Jun 17:40

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## DREAM PALACE: THE FILMS THAT CINEMAS WERE BUILT FOR

### Blow Out

Mon 17 May 17:45 (+ intro by Ben Roberts, BFI CEO); Tue 1 Jun 20:40

### Winner of the Dream Palace Audience Vote: Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)

Mon 17 May 20:45; Sun 30 May 12:20

### The General

Tue 18 May 18:10 (+ intro by Stuart Brown, BFI Head of  
Programme and Acquisitions); Sat 29 May 12:45

### The Shout

+ pre-recorded intro by Mark Jenkin

Wed 19 May 21:00; Thu 3 Jun

### The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

Thu 20 May 17:30 (+ intro by Justin Johnson, BFI Lead Programmer); Thu  
24 Jun 20:30

### Footloose

+ pre-recorded intro by Francis Lee

Thu 20 May 20:45; Sat 29 May 18:00

### Car Wash

Fri 21 May 18:00 (+ intro by Gurinder Chadha); Mon 31 May 18:50

### David Byrne's American Utopia

Fri 21 May 20:45 (+ intro by Tricia Tuttle, BFI Festival Director);

Mon 14 Jun 18:00

### Beginning

+ pre-recorded intro by Luca Guadagnino

Sat 22 May 11:30; Tue 22 Jun 20:30

### Black Narcissus

Sat 22 May 14:20 (+ intro by Edgar Wright); Mon 7 Jun 17:50

### The Wonders (Le meraviglie)

+ pre-recorded intro by Mark Cousins

Sat 22 May 15:15; Thu 3 Jun 20:30

### Hair

+ pre-recorded intro by Kleber Mendonça Filho

Sat 22 May 20:30; Fri 28 May 17:45

### Magnificent Obsession + Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)

Sun 23 May 15:45 (+ intro by Heather Stewart, BFI Creative Director); Sun  
6 Jun 18:40

### Beau Travail

+ pre-recorded intro by Kirsten Johnson

Sun 23 May 18:40; Sun 30 May 18:20

### Mirror (Zerkalo)

+ pre-recorded intro by Malgorzata Szumowska

Mon 24 May 17:50; Wed 9 Jun 14:30

### Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawat)

+ pre-recorded intro by Chaitanya Tamhane

Mon 24 May 20:30; Sat 19 Jun 17:50

### Goodbye, Dragon Inn (Bú sà'n)

Wed 26 May 18:10 (+ intro by Peter Strickland); Wed 2 Jun 20:50

### The Gleaners & I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse)

+ pre-recorded intro by Zhu Shengze

Thu 27 May 18:15; Fri 26 Jun 14:30

### The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet)

+ pre-recorded intro by Mike Williams, Editor *Sight & Sound*

Fri 28 May 20:50; Wed 30 Jun 14:30

### Broadcast News

Sun 30 May 15:40 (+ intro by Sarah Smith); Sat 19 Jun 20:20

### The Elephant Man

+ pre-recorded intro by Prano Bailey-Bond

Tue 15 Jun 17:45; Sat 19 Jun 12:00

### The Warriors

Mon 21 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia); Mon 28 Jun 14:30

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