



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Maltese Falcon

The Maltese Falcon

Directed by: John Huston

©/Production Company/Presented by:
Warner Bros.

Executive Producer: Hal B. Wallis

Associate Producer: Henry Blanke

Dialogue Director: Robert Foulk

Screen Play by: John Huston

Based upon the novel by: Dashiell Hammett

Director of Photography: Arthur Edeson

Editor: Thomas Richards

Art Director: Robert Haas

Gowns by: Orry-Kelly

Make-up Artist: Perc Westmore

Music by: Adolph Deutsch

Musical Director: Leo F. Forbstein

Sound by: Oliver S. Garretson

uncredited

Unit Manager: Al Alleborn

Assistant Directors: Jack Sullivan, Claude Archer

2nd Assistant Director: John Prettyman

Script Clerk: Meta Rebner

Script Editor: Allen Rivkin

Additional Photography: Ernest Haller

1st Assistant Camera: Wally Meinardus

2nd Assistant Camera: Michael Joyce

Grip: E.F. Dexter

Gaffer: William Conger

Best Boy: William Steudeman

Stills Photography: Mack Elliott

Montages: Don Siegel

Scenic Artist: William McConnell

Properties: Gilbert Kissel

Assistant Properties: Keefe Malley

Wardrobe Woman: Cora Lobb

Wardrobe Man: B.W. Kring

Make-up: Frank McCoy

Hair: Joan Udko

Orchestrations: Arthur Lange

Cast:

Humphrey Bogart (*Samuel 'Sam' Spade*)

Mary Astor (*Brigid O'Shaughnessy*)

Gladys George (*Iva Archer*)

Peter Lorre (*Joel Cairo*)

Barton MacLane (*Lieutenant of Detectives Dundy*)

Lee Patrick (*Effie Perine*)

Sydney Greenstreet (*Kasper Gutman*)

Ward Bond (*Detective Tom Polhaus*)

Jerome Cowan (*Miles Archer*)

Elisha Cook Jr (*Wilmer Cook*)

James Burke (*Luke*)

Murray Alper (*Frank Richman*)

John Hamilton (*District Attorney Bryan*)

uncredited

Emory Parnell (*mate of 'La Paloma'*)

Robert E. Homans (*policeman*)

Creighton Hale (*stenographer*)

Walter Huston (*Captain Jacobi*)

Charles Drake, William Hopper, Hank Mann

(*reporters*)

Jack Mower (*postal clerk*)

Jack Perrin (*policeman*)

John Skins Miller (*sign painter*)

Paul Panzer, Sidney Bracey (*men on street*)

USA 1941©

101 mins

Digital 4K

John Huston's career started erratically; the son of Walter Huston, he began as an actor himself. After several false starts it was not until 1938 that his career in films got under way. For the next four years he worked with Warners on such scripts as *Juarez*, *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, *High Sierra*; his first chance as writer-director came in 1941 with *The Maltese Falcon*.

The adaptation is a devoted piece of work. Huston had long wanted to film Hammett's novel and realised that it presented, almost as it stood, all the ingredients for an exciting drama of murder, rapacity and intrigue. Inevitably he had to compress – one minor figure (Rhea Guttman, the Fat Man's daughter) disappears, and the complications are foreshortened – but his adaptation is otherwise scrupulously faithful. Most of the dialogue is Hammett's; the plot development is identical; the characters are as near to the original as is humanly possible.

The Maltese Falcon has been flattered by a host of imitators, but never rivalled. Its success is due largely to its discipline; it is composed of many excellences in performance and technique, but such is Huston's grasp that none of these is permitted to destroy the balance of the whole as a piece of story-telling – a strange, fantastically peopled situation working uncompromisingly to its inevitable conclusion. Unlike its successors it never stoops to sensationalism or to the conventional simplifications usually dictated by the box-office.

It is interesting to note that two of its characters at least survived to figure in later films of the genre: the Fat Man (*The Falcon*, introduced by Sydney Greenstreet for the first time) and the false heroine, the beautiful, lethal schemer, here given her classic portrayal by Mary Astor. But the perfection had never been recaptured, either by Greenstreet himself in his appearances since, or (in, for instance, *The Fallen Sparrow*, *Build My Gallows High*, *The Lady from Shanghai*) by any of Miss Astor's futile imitators.

Lindsay Anderson, National Film Theatre programme notes

The word 'hero' never seems to fit the *noir* protagonist, for his world is devoid of the moral framework necessary to produce the traditional hero. He has been wrenched from familiar moorings, and is a hero only in the modern sense in which that word has been progressively redefined to fit the existential bias of contemporary fiction. For the past 50 years we have groped for some term that would more aptly describe such a protagonist: the Hemingway hero; the anti-hero; the rebel hero; the non-hero.

In one respect the Sam Spade of Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*, as portrayed by Humphrey Bogart, is the least typical *noir* hero since he is the least vulnerable. Unlike Warner Brothers' first two attempts at the novel (1931 and 1936), this third is quite faithful to both the letter and the spirit of the Hammett original. The film's one unfortunate omission is the Flitcraft parable Spade tells Brigid O'Shaughnessy, for this is our only chance to peep into Spade's interior life. And what it reveals is that Spade is by nature an existentialist, with a strong conception of the randomness of existence. Robert Edenbaum sees Spade as representative of Hammett's 'daemonic' tough guy: '... He is free of sentiment, of the fear of death, of the temptations of money and sex. He is what Albert Camus calls "a man without memory", free of the burden of the past. He is

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Out of Sight

Fri 1 Sep 20:30; Thu 7 Sep 20:35; Fri 22 Sep 17:55

Girlhood (Bande des filles)

Sat 2 Sep 16:00; Sun 17 Sep 18:30;

Mon 2 Oct 18:10

Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45;

Sat 30 Sep 15:40

Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40;

Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

Notorious

Tue 5 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 11:45;

Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

The Wind Will Carry Us

(Bad mara khahad bourd)

Wed 6 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Shohini Chaudhuri,

Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex);

Fri 15 Sep 20:40

Ace in the Hole (aka The Big Carnival)

Fri 8 Sep 14:40; Mon 11 Sep 20:45;

Fri 29 Sep 18:00

The Killers

Sat 9 Sep 18:20; Tue 12 Sep 14:30;

Mon 18 Sep 20:50

The Maltese Falcon

Sun 10 Sep 11:50; Mon 25 Sep 14:40;

Tue 26 Sep 20:55

F for Fake

Wed 13 Sep 18:20 (+ intro by Jason Wood,

BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

Barry Lyndon

Sat 16 Sep 19:30; Sun 24 Sep 14:30

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Tue 19 Sep 20:45; Tue 26 Sep 18:05

Au revoir les enfants

Wed 20 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic and lecturer

Dr Julia Wagner); Thu 28 Sep 20:45

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capable of any action, without regard to conventional morality, and thus is apparently as amoral ... as his antagonists. His refusal to submit to the trammels which limit ordinary mortals results in a godlike immunity and independence, beyond the power of his enemies ... [but] the price he pays for his power is to be cut off behind his own self-imposed masks, in an isolation that no criminal, in a community of crime, has to face.' ('The Poetics of the Private Eyes', in *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, edited by David Madden; Carbondale, Illinois, 1968)

Robert G. Porfiro, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1976

Contemporary reviews

The son of a famous father – who incidentally plays a very small part in the film, for luck, perhaps – John Huston has used with effective moderation the idea of the camera seeking and emphasising some characteristic, mental or physical or both of its subject rather than its ordinary form. This approach has undoubtedly added to the strength of the very fine performance of Sydney Greenstreet as Kasper Gutman, the arch-crook, and Mr Huston has been wise enough to confine the idea to one character only. His lighting and camera work is unusual in what would normally be unnoticed sequences. For example, a telephone on a bedside table with night-light upon it from the open window plus a side-lamp, the speaker being out of the picture, but the voice heard. In other words, the picture of a telephone conversation. The story is strong of itself with an unusual ending and fine acting, but it is the treatment which makes it the best thriller so far this year.

Evelyn Russell, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1942

This is a brilliantly directed, brilliantly acted and somewhat unusual film of its type. The atmosphere is well-sustained throughout and the casting is excellent. Mary Astor as the lovely but wicked Brigid is uncommonly attractive, and Lee Patrick gives a good performance as Spade's efficient and understanding secretary. Spade himself is played with aplomb by Humphrey Bogart. Finally the hitherto unknown Sydney Greenstreet gives a magnificent characterisation as the fat arch-villain.

Monthly Film Bulletin, April 1942