



THE BIG SLEEP is a Fourth Quarter 2015 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library.
Here is Kino Ken's review of that dvd.

17 of a possible 20 points

****1/2 of a possible *****

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

U.S. 1945 / 1946 black-and-white / black-and-white 116 minutes / 114 minutes

Warner Bros. Pictures Producer: Howard Hawks

Points:

- 2 Direction: Howard Hawks*
 - 2 Editing: Christian Nyby*
 - 1 Cinematography: Sidney Hickox
 - 2 Lighting
 - Special Visual Effects: Paul Detlefsen
 - 1 Screenplay: William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett, Jules Furthman (reshoot dialogues)
based on the novel by Raymond Chandler
 - Musical Director: Leo Forbstein
 - 1 Music: Max Steiner (KING KONG; GONE WITH THE WIND)
 - Music Mixer: Charles David Forrest
 - 2 Art Direction: Max Parker* (Supervising) and Carl Jules Weyl*
 - Set Decorations: Fred MacLean (TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE)
 - Makeup: Perc Westmore
 - 2 Sound: Robert Lee*, Gerald Alexander*, Robert Wayne*
 - 2 Acting
 - 2 Creativity
- 17 total points

Cast: Humphrey Bogart* (Philip Marlowe, private investigator), Lauren Bacall (Mrs. Vivian Rutledge, sister to Carmen), John Ridgely (Eddie Mars, casino owner), Martha Vickers (Carmen Sternwood, sister to Vivian Rutledge), Dorothy Malone* (Acme Book Shop proprietress), Peggy Knudsen (Mona Mars, Eddie's wife), Regis Toomey* (Chief Inspector Bernie Ohls), Charles Waldron* (General Sternwood), Charles Brown (Norris, the Sternwood butler), Bob Steele* (Lash Canino, hit man), Elisha Cook, Jr.* (Harry Jones, smalltime blackmailer), Louis Jean Heydt (Joe Brody), Trevor Bardette* (Art Huck, auto mechanic and garage owner), Joy Barlow (taxi driver), Max Barwyn (head waiter Max), Jack Chefe (croupier), Joseph Crehan* (medical examiner), Sonia Darrin* nee Paskowitz (Agnes Lowzier, Joe Brody's blackmailing accomplice), Carole Douglas (librarian), Tom Fadden (Sidney), Lorraine Miller (hatcheck girl), Shelby Payne* (cigarette girl), Tommy Rafferty (Carol Lundgren), Emmett Vogan (Deputy Sheriff Ed), Theodore von Eltz (Arthur Gwynn Geiger), Dan Wallace (Owen Taylor, Sternwood chauffeur), Ben Welden (Pete), others

While war devastates Europe, Los Angeles is plagued by blackmailers, pushers, and idle rich who waste their money on gambling and drugs. It's time to call on Private Investigator Philip Marlowe to unravel crime mysteries, or so General Sternwood believes.

That retired invalid, confined to his house, has two very lively daughters who mingle all too freely with underworld characters in the city of angels. His eldest, Vivian, is a divorced thrill seeker with an unquenchable attraction to gambling. Her younger sibling Carmen shares that weakness. She also flaunts nymphomaniac behavior.

Both are reckless, well-funded, not overly picky about male companions.

Marlowe, played coolly by Humphrey Bogart, is requested to track down a certain Arthur Gwynn Geiger who seems to hold IOUs for a number of gaming house debts contracted by Carmen. The General wants Arthur squelched and Carmen financially liberated from him. Mr. Geiger is a nuisance.

Former employee Sean Regan was supposed to have settled that problem. He disappeared without leaving a forwarding address. No one explains to the General why or how. Regan is an old adversary of Marlowe's, reputedly well able to defend himself from potential murderers. Philip characterizes him as more Casanova than Heep, highly unlikely to enmesh himself in any extortion scheme. Perhaps an unwise dalliance triggered a violent response.

After being briefed on his assignment by Papa Sternwood, the detective is privately summoned to a conference with Vivian. She wants badly to know if he's been hired to track down Regan. Marlowe verbally duels with her, seeking to ferret out some motive for meddling with General Sternwood's personal affairs. Ultimately he asserts his job is only to find Mr. Geiger and convince him to curtail his illegal game.

However, someone else locates the scoundrel first and knocks him off. When Marlowe reaches the crime scene he finds a lifeless body, doped Carmen, and coded book with names, addresses, and payment demands. Apparently the late Mr. Geiger had a knack for creating lethal enemies.

Who was his murderer? Carmen? The General's chauffeur, Owen Taylor, a spurned lover of the younger Sternwood daughter? An unidentified accomplice to the blackmailer?

Marlowe tugs on his ear lobe in consternation. Maybe Sean Regan is mixed up with this affair. Suspects lurk all over the place.

One is eliminated when police discover the dead body of Owen Taylor in a car driven off an oceanside pier later that same night. A medical examiner informs Marlowe and his L.A.P.D. ally that Taylor died of blunt force injuries unrelated to, and preceding, a plunge into the water. The missing photograph of Carmen Marlowe has been tracking is still unrecovered. If Taylor didn't have it when he died, who took it from him? And why?

The drama continues along a bloody trail which includes an assisted "suicide," a fake holdup, another outright murder, two muggings of Marlowe, and a final shootout involving a remorseless professional torpedo named Lash Canino. The elder Sternwood daughter is implicated in these events. So are a counterfeit antiquarian bookseller's assistant named Agnes Lowzier, the bodyguard of deceased Arthur Geiger, casino owner Eddie Mars, a garage mechanic fence identified as Art Huck, even a petty extortionist seduced by Agnes. All but Marlowe want a piece of the action. Most are quite willing to employ violence in obtaining it.

Though often categorized as a film noir, *THE BIG SLEEP* is not a pure model of that genre. It boasts a femme fatale, storm scenes, double crosses, and a protagonist not always adhering firmly to legal requirements. There's enough amorality and callousness to satisfy hardened enthusiasts.

But what distinguishes this Howard Hawks film most is its literary pedigree and polish. Originating in a pulp novel by Raymond Chandler, an appetizing overlay of witty repartee was added by screenwriters. These included William Faulkner and the estimable Jules Furthman.

Scenes played out between Lauren Bacall's Vivian and Bogart's sleep-deprived gumshoe are especially fascinating, real offscreen romance paralleling film activity. Editor Christian Nyby, a Hawks favorite who also cut *TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT*, *RED RIVER*, and *THE BIG SKY*, times scenes brilliantly, allowing Bacall plenty of leisure to spar with Bogart while explosively pacing outbursts of gunfire. Note especially languorous pacing of Bogart's bookstore scene with Dorothy Malone, one of the most seductive ever filmed, loaded with innuendos.

For anyone determined to unravel the film's tortuous plot, there are illuminating synopses available to read among user reviews at [IMDB's page](https://www.imdb.com) for *THE BIG SLEEP*. Few viewers are likely to untangle it on first screening without detailed assistance from such sources.

Sidney Hickox's cinematography stunningly highlights faces of Bogart, Bacall and a superior supporting cast, allowing each one a chance to embed in viewer memory. Soft-spoken go-

between Harry Jones is enacted unforgettably by Elisha Cook, Jr. Just as acutely defined is Trevor Bardette's cowardly Art Huck, managing to project nasty rudeness and sweaty cowardice with equal conviction. Bob Steele's impassive Lash Camino and Charles Waldron's General Sternwood, a physically ruined sensualist long past his prime, are additional stellar accomplishments. It's impossible to overlook Sonia Darrin as Agnes Lowzier, a loveless, manipulative, avaricious vamp men would do well to ignore. It was no easy task to portray a serial loser who somehow manages to survive in a criminal jungle despite her character misjudgments. The same cannot be said for her partners.

Certainly **THE BIG SLEEP** is one of the finest directorial accomplishments of Howard Hawks, who wisely reshot and strengthened many key scenes, increasing their dramatic payoffs in the process. While the final theatrical release version leaves more questions unanswered than its predecessor of a year earlier, it more than compensates for that shortcoming with further character revelations and more engaging dialogues.

Sound and lighting are top tier on this dvd, offering speech so well enunciated that even syllables become prominent features, as in the stressed pronunciation of "shamus" as "shaw-mus." Pistol shots have stunning snappiness. The quiet clink of liquor glass being set down on table, a sudden shower spattering sidewalks and canopies, clacking of a roulette wheel and other sonic subtleties substantially enhance one of Hollywood's most intriguing crime dramas.

Better known for scoring **KING KONG** and **GONE WITH THE WIND**, Max Steiner's background music in this instance is relatively restrained, more often reinforcing than generating atmosphere, allowing sound effects and lighting to lead in setting tone and ambience.

As film entertainment for adult audiences, **THE BIG SLEEP** has lost none of its potency and pull with age. The story it tells is completely unsuitable for preteens. Plot and thematic complexity will be lost on teen viewers with insufficient life experience to comprehend what is frequently merely implicit.

Warner Video's double-sided dvd release of **THE BIG SLEEP** includes both pre-release and theatrical release versions and Robert Gitt's commentary on differences between them. A theatrical trailer, subtitles, scene access, and production notes are also included.