



***Alias Nick Beal* is a prospective future LVCA dvd donation (2026) to the Hugh Stoupe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that American film drama.**

15 of a possible 20 points = *1/2 = a superior film**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

**United States 1949 black-and-white 93 minutes live action feature fantasy
Paramount Pictures, Inc. Producer: Endre Bohém a Kino Lorber dvd release**

Points:

- 1 Direction: John Farrow**
- 2 Editing: Eda Warren**
- 2 Cinematography: Lionel Lindon***
Still Photography: Ed Henderson
- 2 Lighting: Stanley Williams***
- 1 Screenplay: Jonathan Latimer, based on an original story by Mindret Lord**
Script Supervision: Charles Morton
- 1 Music: Franz Waxman**
Orchestrations: Sidney Cuther, George Parrish, Leonid Raab, and Van Cleave
- 2 Art Direction: Franz Bachelin and Hans Dreier**
Set Decoration: Sam Comer and Ross Dowd
Costume Design: Mary Kay Dodson
Makeup: Wally Westmore (Supervision), Delven Armstrong, and Ted Larsen

2 Sound: Gene Garvin and Philip Wisdom

0 Acting

2 Creativity

15 total points

Cast: Ray Milland* (Nick Beal), Audrey Totter (Donna Allen), Thomas Mitchell (Joseph Foster), George Macready (Rev. Thomas Garfield), Fred Clark (Frankie Faulkner), Geraldine Wall (Martha Foster), Henry O'Neill (Judge Hobson), Darryl Hickman (Larry Price), Nestor Paiva (Karl), King Donovan (Peter Wolfe), Charles Evans (Paul Norton), Ernö Verebes (Mr. Cox, a tailor), Douglas Spencer* (Henry Finch), Arleen Jenkins (Aileen, maid to Fosters), Pepito Pérez (poster man), Joey Ray (Tommy Ray), Michael Clifton (Matthew), Ray Dolciami (Tony), Maxine Gates (Josie, fat floozie in bar), Theresa Harris (Opal, Donna's maid), Orley Lindgren (j) (boy who brings note), Steve Pendleton (Detective Sergeant Hill), Tim Ryan (Detective Dodds)

Alias Nick Beal is one of director John Farrow's most polished and durable films. Lionel Linden's cinematography, abounding in carefully crafted compositions, remarkably effective key lighting, and highly detailed art direction by Franz Bachelin and Hans Dreier team with Ray Milland's icy contemporary Mephistopheles portrayal to make this *Faust* update an effective morality play. It's well worth viewing, though neither a film noir nor elegant literary adaptation. Instead, Farrow's pet project emerges as a crisply edited study in political corruption raising questions that still resonate today.

Thomas Mitchell is Joseph Foster, a civic-minded, conscientious district attorney intent on indicting mobster Frankie Faulkner. Faulkner is a brighter bulb, however, and directs bookkeeper Henry Finch to burn incriminating logs before Foster can lay hands on them. This Finch manages to do, as audiences learn at a later time. Enter Nick Beal to save Foster from an embarrassing failure. He has underhanded access to the evidence Mr. D.A. badly needs and will provide it – for a certain return favor. Mitchell's single-minded corruption-buster refuses to look this dubious gift horse in the mouth, permitting himself to be led along an ever-darkening pathway to criminality. The bait, simultaneously on offer from both a government reform brain trust and the mysteriously appearing and disappearing Mr. Beal, is election to a governorship.

That can be obtained by tossing a few unimportant monetary and office scraps to a deal-making partnership of Faulkner and Beal. They will swing key Kennedy precincts to Foster's side. An extra bonus, should Foster decide to adopt Beal's advice and proposals, is after-hours companionship of one Donna Allen, a prostitute and lush who's been bribed by Beal's gifts to seduce the blindsided gubernatorial candidate.

Beal has to work hard at first to pry Foster away from the clutches of his straight-arrow wife and old buddy Reverend Thomas Garfield, both of whom find that interloping stranger repugnant and suspicious. He also has to keep Allen in line. She's inclined to wayward emotional outbursts of partial truth disclosures.

Rather unconvincingly, Allen sets up shop at campaign headquarters, managing appointments, dictating publicity, and filtering who gets to see and speak with the candidate personally. Just how she suddenly acquired all these political skills is left unexplained.

Mrs. Foster, smelling a rat, tries to dissuade her husband from accepting any loans or propositions from the increasingly blunt and dictatorial Beal. Joseph contemptuously rebuffs her suggestions, calling her a hypocrite and missionary. He'd much rather be around Miss Allen, who's less critical and far more flattering to his vanity. There are so many worthwhile changes he could bring about as governor. But no, his censorious spouse prefers he should give up those dreams. Why not retire from public service altogether or settle for a low profile law office job?

Well, it's hello Donna and goodbye Martha for a while, as Beal successfully steers Foster to victory in the gubernatorial election. Immediately afterwards, Nick reveals his hand to the new executive. The newly minted governor must turn over all key offices to Beal and Faulkner's associates. If he refuses to do so, Nick will see to it Foster is implicated in the newly reopened murder of Henry Finch, a man who happened to have tried unsuccessfully to blackmail the former D.A. prior to his drowning. Is it mere coincidence a pipe identical to those in a set at the governor's residence was found on the body of the deceased?

The net is closing. Foster belatedly realizes he's been trapped. His choices are shame or ruin. He selects full disclosure, turning the governorship over to his lieutenant, a man untainted by moral compromise.

There's still a debt owing to Beal, however. The loaner plans collecting in full.

One of the greatest assets of this film is its sound recording, particularly Nick's whistlings in the fog. They're reminiscent of the foreboding Grieg tootling of Peter Lorre's moppetidal maniac in Fritz Lang's *M*.

Art direction is startlingly delirious, especially wall murals in the luxury apartment Beal uses as Donna's upscale lodgings. Resembling prudish versions of surrealistic odalisques, they are intended apparently to form an interlocking pair, suggesting seduction rather than trumpeting it. How that artwork won approval from 1940s studio censorship is itself a mystery. Interior library furnishings are thick with rather dusty-looking tomes, probably more decorative than used.

Frequent employment of split lighting yields major rewards, denying viewers the privilege of studying full faces for character clues while compounding suspense and mystery. Generous dollops of low key lighting leave shadowy pools in scenes immediately prior to Nick's arrival. They also intensify foggy atmosphere doubling for moral dubiousness.

Eda Warren's film editing keeps action springing forward, assisted considerably by Jonathan Latimer's terse, telling dialogue. Conversations never overstay their welcome, though content runs often to the predictably moralistic.

Unfortunately, Thomas Mitchell doesn't swell his character to proportions commensurate with the story being told. He's too naïve and pawn-like here, certainly no match for the power being directed against him. There seems very little internal resistance in Foster's personality. So audiences can't invest fully in sympathizing with his predicament. George Macready's pious Reverend Garfield is a mere plot puppet and Geraldine Wall is the kind of puritanical Goody-Two-Shoes most men would studiously avoid cultivating friendship with, a dour and unpleasantly duty-bound soul. Darryl Hickman's "adolescent tough" is absolutely risible, bearing no resemblance whatsoever to a juvenile delinquent desperately in need of redemption. Ernő Verebes, a Hungarian import, has small credibility as a fussy tailor. Better are Fred Clark's Frankie Faulkner, for at least his hatchet-blade profile resembles what is expected in a gangster's physiognomy, and Orley Lindgren's messenger boy, who looks suitably confused about his errand.

Franz Waxman's score is a terrible drawback, insistently underlining what is already richly communicated by plentiful visual clues and literate, coherent dialogue.

Farrow's direction is generally effective, though both Mitchell and Wall are badly miscast. Mitchell's forte is unfolding complicated or unsympathetic personalities. Foster is neither of these. Wall doesn't have a strong enough individual likeableness to generate enthusiasm or sympathy for her character in viewers.

On balance, *Alias Nick Beal* retains a great deal of fascinating suspense, as audiences try to foresee when and how the title character will materialize or evaporate. The dvd includes a two-minute original theatrical trailer and a meandering audio commentary by Eddie Muller who spends more than enough time extolling the limited virtues of Audrey Totter and Geraldine Wall, frequently neglecting comment on scenes within the film as they unspool.

Recommended and entertaining viewing for adults, the central themes dealt with are not of much interest to teens and quite unsuitable for children.