



***Man Hunt* is a 1941 espionage thriller directed by Fritz Lang. Below is Kino Ken's review of that LVCA summer 2026 dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library of Ligonier, Pennsylvania.**

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

**United States 1941 black-and-white 102 minutes live action feature drama
20th Century Fox Film Corporation Producers: Kenneth MacGowan and
Len Hammond a 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment dvd release**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Fritz Lang***
- 2 Editing: Allen McNeil***
- 2 Cinematography: Arthur Miller***
- 2 Lighting**

- 1 Screenplay: Dudley Nichols and Lamar Trotti
- 0 Music: Alfred Newman and David Buttolph
Orchestrations: Edward Powell and Herbert Spencer
- 1 Art Direction: Richard Day and Wiard Ihnen
Set Decoration: Thomas Little*
Props: Don Greenwood
Costume Design: Travis Banton
- 2 Sound: Eugene Grossman* and Roger Heman, Sr.*
- 1 Acting
- 2 Creativity
- 15 total points

Cast: Walter Pidgeon (Captain Alan Thorndike), Joan Bennett (Jerry Stokes), George Sanders* (Major Quive-Smith), John Carradine* (Mr. Jones), Roddy McDowall (j)* (Vaner), Ludwig Stössel* (doctor), Heather Thatcher (Lady Alice Risborough), Frederick Worlock (Lord Gerald Risborough), Roger Imhof (Captain Jensen), Charles Bennett (costermonger), Frank Benson (cab driver), Ted Billings (newsboy), Walter Bonn (harbor policeman), Sven Hugo Borg (ship's first mate), Egon Brecher (Whiskers pawnbroker), Cyril Delevanti (cab driver), Carl Ekberg (Adolf Hitler), Herbert Evans (Reeves), Richard Fraser (navigator), Arno Frey (police lieutenant), Douglas Gerrard (policeman), Gibson Gowland (man on Underground reading paper), William Haade (third sentry), Bobbie Hale (costermonger), Holmes Herbert* (Saul Farnsworthy), Keith Hitchcock (bobby), Adolf Hitler (Adolf Hitler – archive footage), Olaf Hytten (Piel – Saul's law clerk), Hans Joby (German tracker), Kurt Krueger (German attaché), Bruce Lester (co-pilot), Adolf Licho (little fat man), Eily Malyon (Lyme Regis postmistress), Lester Matthews (major), Virginia McDowall (Mary, the postmistress's daughter), Adolph Milar (German pigeon man), Carl Ottmar (harbor policeman), Lucien Prival (umbrella henchman), Otto Reichow (first sentry), John Rogers (Cockney-henchman), Clifford Severn (j) (Cockney boy), Robert Stephenson (second sentry), Frederick Vogeding (ambassador), Wilhelm von Brincken (harbor police chief), Katherine Yorke (woman passerby)

Fritz Lang's *Man Hunt* was his payback to the Nazis for compelling him to leave Germany, the alternative being to become the film propaganda chief of the Reich, a post he certainly didn't wish for himself. Starring Canadian native Walter Pidgeon as a British big-game hunter and American actress Joan Bennett in the role of a Cockney streetwalker / seamstress, this anti-Nazi illustrated lecture was hobbled by a sensational, yet condescending screenplay concocted by the usually formidable Dudley Nichols and ace Hollywood dialogue creator Lamar Trotti. Nonetheless, the Austrian native's espionage thriller triumphed ultimately due to impeccable sound recording, intensely atmospheric lighting, highly compressed editing, intriguing art direction, and a judicious mix of character-defining closeups preceding what appeared to be a documentary montage of overlapping dissolves tracking parallel accounts of protagonist Thorndike's prolonged restoration to health and Britain's increasingly complex involvement in World War II.

The original story outline came from an adult espionage novel by Geoffrey Household titled *Rogue Male*. In the book, experienced aristocratic safari hunter Captain Alan Thorndike resolves to prove to himself an accomplished tracker and rifleman could penetrate the Berghof's famed security. Achieving this without interference or detection, he then decides to load a live bullet into his weapon and once again pull the trigger. This second thought proves enormously costly to him when a guard patrolling the area hears the click of a sear losing its grip on a striker and throws himself on an unexpected interloper, causing deflection of Thorndike's shot.

Presumably the foreigner is subdued by defenders attracted by gunshot noise. Though there are no explicit scenes of that.

Brought into the Berghof for interrogation, the Briton claims he was only intent on a "sporting stalk." Assassination wasn't part of the plan.

Major Quive-Smith, a most unlikely moniker for a German ranking officer, doesn't believe his uninvited guest. He insists Alan sign a document, one stating explicitly the intruder was acting on behalf of Britain's government and bent on throwing Germany into chaos. Of course, his prisoner refuses, accusing the major and his revered leader of being delusional bullies.

Which induces cold rage in Quive-Smith, leading first to Thorndike's being beaten severely and then, since that failed to elicit the desired "confession,"

pushed off a rock ledge into a deep chasm below by the community's most inhospitable and treacherous doctor.

With looming problem resolved and in possession of Thorndike's identifying passport, two Deutschland confederates temporarily believe themselves ready to plant a mole in London. Alas for them, their former prisoner hasn't been so easily eliminated. An intercepting branch broke his fall. Through a second miraculous intervention he eludes not only fellow hunter Quive-Smith, but also the major's partner-in-crime and a set of canine trackers. Not to mention every searching local policeman and security guard.

Safely crossing hundreds of miles inside enemy territory, a battered and exhausted Captain Thorndike arrives at an international seaport. He then manages to pull himself up a rope ladder to the deck of an outbound Danish-registered ship. Despite being closely followed by assorted army and police personnel, Alan gives them the slip. He's fortuitously hidden in two unlikely places by an English ship's boy, played in engagingly lively fashion by actual war refugee Roddy McDowall.

Though little Vaner correctly suspects last-minute passenger Mr. Jones of being a sinister phony, more mature Thorndike blithely discounts the possibility of such danger lurking nearby.

So guess who soon finds himself all but surrounded by menaces once landed in supposedly friendly England?

To meet studio demand for some romantic interest, a young woman of preposterously adventurous inclination becomes entangled with Thorndike when his only viable escape route from ambush by deadly pursuers in London leads him to her apartment building.

Quive-Smith later spots sorrowful abandoned Miss Jerry Stokes in the Underground. Serendipitously right after Thorndike's departure on a train. He uses information gathered from a combination of vicious torture of the Captain's presumptive lover and thorough search of Jerry's room to corner his prey in a small cave near Lyme Regis. There two "sportsmen" engage in a lethal final confrontation. That allows for prolonged restatement of their opposing political philosophies.

Unfortunately, scripters opted for an epilogue to that. It finds Thorndike parachuting back into Germany from a British bomber. He's preoccupied with a revenge mission. This undercuts the larger and far more important matter of

defending vulnerable nations and their citizens from aggressive external attackers. A pity.

While Lang's direction of technical assistants was notably astute here, his mentoring of performers left much to be desired. Joan Bennett slid in conversation unpredictably from Cockney tramp to American actress posing as native Briton and then back again to the former role. Similarly, Walter Pidgeon's Thorndike sounded just about as thoroughly British as Henry Fonda's U.S. President in *Fail-Safe*. The game was up linguistically the moment young McDowall opened his mouth. For the speech of Vaner is genuinely English, starkly pointing up the deficiency of *Man Hunt*'s adult co-stars in that regard. Even worse, dialogue invented for Jerry and Alan frequently descends into adolescent intercourse devoid of both maturity and substantive content.

However, John Carradine's ominously threatening gentleman assassin, one Mr. Jones, and Ludwig Stössel's perversely sadistic physician pass muster completely. So does George Sanders as a thoroughly brainwashed Nazi commander with total mastery of both German and English. Character actor Holmes Herbert completely reinvents himself in the minor role of Thorndike's solicitor Saul Farnsworthy.

Lighting of studio sets throughout the film is top-notch, whether forest scenes, nocturnal episodes, or confined interior of man-size stony den. It has a persuasive quality of verisimilitude which painted mountain backgrounds of Richard Day or Wiard Ihnen utterly lack. Thomas Little's set décor is altogether more accomplished, particularly his London pawn shop interior, crammed full of assorted stock in the best "Little Old Curiosity Shop" Victorian manner.

Alfred Newman and David Buttolph contributed a music score persistently restating emotional tensions of scenes without adding any complexity or insight beyond what is already audible or visible. In other words, a dud.

Most polished and attractive of all *Man Hunt*'s technical prowesses is the sound work of Eugene Grossman and Roger Heman, Sr. Rifle crack, passing wind, oars gently plashing seawater, barking dogs, chirping birds – all are replicated to perfection on the soundtrack.

Its vicious violence, irresolute conclusion, morally ambiguous characters, and the suggestion of inexorable vengeance becoming primary goal of protagonist Thorndike make this Lang film unsuited to any but adult viewers. For those it's a sensually compelling film experience.

Bonus features of this Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment dvd release include an often annoyingly subjective and rather snide audio commentary by author Patrick McGilligan, a seventeen-minute perceptive mini-documentary from 2009 titled *Rogue Male: The Making of Man Hunt*, an approximately two-minute theatrical trailer revealing far too much plot, a restoration comparison featurette of dubious value, fourteen frames of an advertising gallery, five frames of film artwork, and forty-two frames of still photos related to the movie.