

FILM REVIEW

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Pidgeon). He sinks to the ground, takes careful aim, and full in the telescopic sights of his rifle, 550 yards away across a ravine, is focused the biggest game any man could hunt — Adolf Hitler, taking the morning air on a balcony of his mountain fastness. But this hunter is an Englishman and a sportsman, and this is purely a "sporting stalk": the fun is in getting one's quarry in the sights, not in firing. However, this explanation of innocent intention does not convince the Nazis who pounce upon the huntsman as he still lies caressing the trigger. Third degree methods supervised by a suave but slimmer counterpart of Goering (George Sanders), having failed to produce the Englishman's signature to a confession that he intended to assassinate the Fuhrer at his Government's request, he is dumped over a precipice and left for dead. Somehow — this is rather delightfully vague — our battered hero escapes to the German coast and so to England.

Thus far very good, and so is much of what follows. But all the time I couldn't help thinking what Alfred Hitchcock might have done with this story if he had been directing it instead of Fritz Lang. *Man Hunt* might then easily have been the best thriller since *The 39 Steps*. But when he gets his hero to England, Mr. Lang has to give way to sentiment, platitudes, preaching, and a good deal of crudity of atmosphere, by introducing,

among other things, a Cockney heroine (Joan Bennett), who is even less like a Cockney than the average American. Her role is a girl of the streets (very discreetly suggested), who shelters and befriends the hunted hunter, falls in love with him, and sacrifices her life for him. For the Nazis so badly want that confession in order to provoke an incident with Britain that they send half the Gestapo across the Channel to get it, in collaboration with what seems like almost half the population of London. (It is rather a shock to find so many Fifth Columnists in German pay popping up everywhere). Worse still, the British authorities can't help our hero, because the German Government demands his extradition for drawing a bead on the Fuhrer, and appeasement is still apparently the order of the British day. So one way and another he has a pretty harassing time before he manages to dispose of the Goering-fellow who has got him cornered in a cave near Lyme Regis. Then World War II. breaks out, and he

wishes he had pulled the trigger after all. To finish the job, our hero goes off in a bomber and takes a parachute jump, and an off-screen voice assures us that somewhere in Germany now there is a hunter with a precision rifle and the high degree of intelligence necessary to use it, and though it may take months or it may take years, this time he will hit Hitler. Which is not only fatuous but also conflicts oddly with our hero's previously strongly-expressed abhorrence of assassination in any form.

However, I don't want to give the impression that *Man Hunt* is a bad picture. It is, in parts, a very good one, well photographed, well acted, and directed with a true feeling of melodramatic suspense, as in that sequence where the Nazi agent stalks his man through the underground railway. But it could as a whole have been so much better. Oh for Mr. Hitchcock!

(Note for students of language: In conjunction with "Fuhrer," it is now permissible to use the word "bloody" on the screen)

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