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## Bitter Victory

Commenting on this remarkable 1957 feature in the *Reader*, Dave Kehr wrote, "Nicholas Ray's direction of black-and-white CinemaScope, that freak child of the 50s, is consistently brilliant in this raw, confused masterpiece about two commando officers (Richard Burton and Curt Jurgens) lost in the North African desert after a dangerous raid. The moral parable fades into metaphysical speculation, as the desert is always there to lend an eternal perspective to the personality conflict. Extensively recut, the film barely makes sense on the narrative level, but Ray, as always, is able to illustrate what he cannot articulate." Now a beautifully restored print with 21 minutes of added footage is showing at the Gene

Siskel Film Center as part of a series on the war film, and while the long version is still a masterpiece, it also remains confused in some respects because of the producer's perverse casting decisions. Jurgens, who had been earmarked for a smaller part as a captured German soldier, was instead given the role that Ray intended for Burton, and Ruth Roman was brought in as the apex of a love triangle involving the two soldiers. But the radical conception remains, and the movie is all the more pertinent during the agony of another desert war. Contemplating the dangerous games men play with macho self-images, this survives as one of Ray's greatest works. 103 min. Reviewed this week in Section One. Gene Siskel Film Center. —Jonathan Rosenbaum