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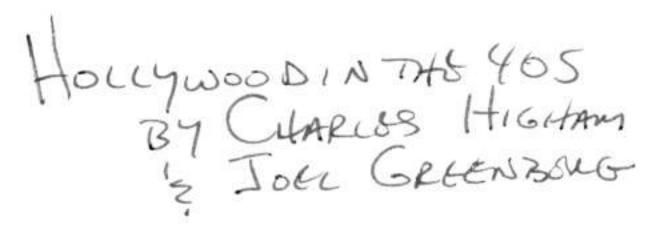
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Closely related to the Chandlers and Hammetts in style was Bruce Humberstone's Hot Spot (1941), with Laird Cregar as a psychotic cop. Delmer Daves' Dark Passage (1947) was in many ways superior to all of these films save The Maltese Falcon. In subjective camera, we follow an escaped criminal from San Quentin, concealed in a barrel, rolling down an embankment, hitching a ride from a petty crook and finally finding concealment with an artist in a flat filled with the sound of the San Francisco foghorns. Bogart as escapee and Bacall as artist guardian play with enchanting grace and humour, so that a dinner enjoyed across a candlelit table, the playing of a tinny gramophone record, the moment when she unwraps his operated-on face and sees him for the first time, achieve an unusually warm sense of intimacy.

The film is directed with a tense impressionist vividness, bringing to life within a fully realised San Franciscan ambience a whole small world of personal relationships. Agnes Moorehead's prying, vicious Madge Rapf is a definitive portrait of bitchery; Houseley Stevenson's plastic surgeon is a memorable gargoyle; and the minor parts — a taxi driver, a blackmailer, even the bystanders in a bus terminal — are brought before us with startling realism. Fluent cutting and Sid Hickox's subtle camerawork evoke the enclosed luxury of the apartment, a spiral staircase, a spinning record, a face pressed to a door-grille, a man nervously withdrawing into the shadows of an upstairs room. A bitter quarrel between friends in the flat late at night, punctuated by foghorns; an operation scene, developed in bizarre montage full of laughing faces and flashing cigarette-lighters; and the death of Madge from a high window: this is a film in which the images and sounds are orchestrated without flaw.