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Review of Somewhere in the Night

Michael Adams

City University of New York

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Somewhere in the Night
(Fox Home Entertainment, 9.6.2005)

Unlike the other two recent entries in Fox's film noir series, [*The House on 92nd Street*](#) and [*Whirlpool*](#), *Somewhere in the Night* is unequivocally the real thing. With Norbert Brodine's atmospheric lighting, rain-slicked streets (though set in Los Angeles), a swanky nightclub, a sultry torch singer, a villain with a foreign accent, a muscle-bound lug, and moral ambiguity to burn, *Somewhere in the Night* is a terrific example of the genre.

George Taylor (John Hodiak) wakes up in a military field hospital in the Pacific with no memory of who he is. Returning to Los Angeles, Taylor, who instinctively knows this is not his real name, finds an old letter from his friend Larry Cravat and tries to track down Cravat to find out who he really is. With the help of singer Christy Smith (Nancy Guild), nightclub owner Mel Phillips (Richard Conte), and cop Lt. Donald Kendall (Lloyd Nolan), Taylor learns that Cravat and another man were involved in stealing \$2 million in loot shipped to the United States by a Nazi officer.

Thus the film noir elements include amnesia, loss of identity, a tormented veteran, involvement with a good woman, Christy, and a very bad one, Phyllis (Margo Woode), and general uncertainty about who the good guys and bad guys are. Viewers who want to try to figure out the identities of Cravat and his fellow thief are advised to wait for the plot twists at the end. Such revelations are also central to noir.

Joseph L. Mankiewicz, directing the first feature he initiated, is a storyteller more than artist, but this film, thanks to Brodine, is much more distinctive visually than is usual for him, with lots of shadows and fog and good blending of backlot shooting and location scenes like the one in L.A.'s Bunker Hill neighborhood. Mankiewicz's playful touch is evident throughout, indicating he did not take the farfetched story too seriously. He pays tribute to his friend Howard Koch by having the writer-producer's name appear on a hotel register, and a casual reference to the concept of double indemnity is a nod to his pal Billy Wilder. At the end of the movie, Kendall says the case's police report will be longer than *Forever Amber*, the bestseller Fox was having extreme difficulty bringing to the screen.

Mankiewicz is limited somewhat by his second-string cast. Hodiak, best known for his role as a seaman in Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*, is more than a bit stiff, though his awkwardness is fitting for the confused character. Unless the lead is Bogart or Mitchum, the stars in films noir do not really matter all that much. Look at Dick Powell in *Murder, My Sweet* or Ralph Meeker in *Kiss Me Deadly*. Atmosphere and plot complexities are the real stars. Starlet Guild, making her debut in the Lauren Bacall/Lizabeth Scott role, is too wholesome but cute. Conte is surprisingly good, and there are many wonderful character actors, such as

Woode, Sheldon Leonard, Josephine Hutchinson, Jeff Corey, Harry Morgan, and Whit Bissell, to support the leads. Fritz Kortner is especially good as an oily manipulator, the type of role associated with Sydney Greenstreet.

Eddie Muller, author of *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir*, provides his usual excellent commentary. Method guru Lee Strasberg unexpectedly appears in the credits for adapting the screenplay. Muller explains that Mankiewicz wanted to help Strasberg get a start in Hollywood, had him sit in on story conferences, and awarded him a credit for keeping track of the byzantine plot. Muller also offers interesting tidbits about the four leads as well as Brodine, making *Somewhere in the Night* one of the more interesting additions to Fox's noir series.—

Michael Adams