

Review #16 : *Nightmare Alley* (1947)

Tyrone Power and Joan Blondell

TRAILER

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G3SS4LZRoQ>

REVIEW

Nightmare Alley works like a **gigantic fate-driven machine**. We see the main character, Stanton Carlyle – memorably enacted by Tyrone Power whose physical beauty underlines his tragic persona – become caught up in the cogs of this machine early on, when he gets the idea of taking over some **mind-reading act**. Henceforward, it's a **dark, descending, fascinating spiral**, since it appears to be going upward at first. Tyrone Power and his beautiful assistant Colleen Gray enter in to the venues of the ultra-rich with their glorified carnival act. Then Gray and earlier *amanuensis* Joan Blondell are supplanted by the mysterious Helen Walker – in a knockout performance...



What is so intriguing now is how Carlyle begins to believe in his own manufactured powers. Thinking himself in control of the cynical ploy concocted by himself and Helen, Stanton is tossed into a pit of **dejection and humiliation** when Colleen foils the scheme. Back on the carnival skids – but this time far lower than he was before – Stanton can only find of redemption in Colleen's embrace. The film could have ended with Gray turning away from the horrific spectacle of the new Geek, but it would have been the darkest of noir conclusions. The studio insisted on the glimmer of hope on Tyrone Power's face.



The film impresses in its use of expressionistic lighting, set design and music to create a feeling of **inescapable, malevolent force driving Stanton Carlyle to ultimate degradation**. This is a film in which no production element seems wasted. It's almost too good to be true, an ideal dark film, grotesque, yet hauntingly beautiful. This is a movie clawing your way to the top. It's all about **being careful what you wish for**. It is a movie about **odd fascinations** with people who are actually messengers of your future in disguise. Ultimately, it is a movie about how futile the love of a good woman is if the man is destined for ruin. Needless to say, it was not standard Hollywood fare in the 40s, and it still isn't today. Its message is somehow both shocking and familiar. See this film. Surrender to it. It's that good ++