

*Kiss Me Deadly*: Can this film be taken seriously?

*The Maltese Falcon* and *Kiss Me Deadly* are similar in that both movies open with a young, attractive, and mysterious young woman randomly entering the life of the main protagonist which triggers a series of events revolving around a McGuffin. But whereas *The Maltese Falcon* can be taken seriously, the same cannot be said for *Kiss Me Deadly*.

*Kiss Me Deadly* is pure camp. In this movie, the caricature of the aggressive, pushy, anti-law, anti-hero, no-nonsense, amoral tough guy is perfected. Mike Hammer is “one of those self-indulgent males who thinks about nothing but his clothes, his car, himself.” Ralph Meeker’s performance as Hammer must be rated as one of the greatest performances in the history of *film noir*. Meeker sets the standard for this type of role. The film’s screenwriter, A. I. Bezzerides, wrote the script for fun. Bezzerides said, “People ask me about the hidden meanings in the script, about the A-bomb, about McCarthyism, what does the poetry mean, and so on. And I can only say that I didn't think about it when I wrote it . . . I was having fun with it.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of a medical doctor lugging around a box containing a mysterious and dangerous thing that is “hot”, or of a harried, disheveled gumshoe repeatedly screwing up, or of the same gumshoe barging into a health club and demanding to look inside some guy’s locker, or of the gumshoe possessing what may be the single largest and gaudiest personal telephone answering machine in history, or of the gumshoe having a girlfriend that’s part-secretary, part-confidante, part-lover and completely a whore, or of the gumshoe’s best friend being an auto mechanic who looks, sounds, and acts like Jerry Colonna, or of the gumshoe driving around in expensive sports cars had to be written for laughs. It is virtually impossible to take such scenes or props seriously. If this movie has any message, it is to sit back, relax, watch it and enjoy it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tom Vallance, “A. I. Bezzerides, no-nonsense novelist/screenwriter,” 1/20/07, *The Independent*, [www.theindependent.uk.co](http://www.theindependent.uk.co). - online

