KINONIK

THE LONG GOODBYE (1973)

Directed by Robert Altman

WEDNESDAY August 27th 7PM



How do you make a noir when noir has been done to death?

By the 1970s, the hard-boiled private eye had become less character and more caricature. But Raymond Chandler's novels were selling just as well as they had during his life, and United Artists had the rights–they just needed the right team. Knowing that a straightforward adaptation of his remaining works would likely flop, "maverick" director Robrt Altman and seasoned screenwriter Leigh Brackett were brought on the project. Their work, along with the cinematography of Vilmos Zsigmond and an oddball cast of actors and non-actors alike, would result in **The Long Goodbye (1973**): a slow hit, "satire in melancholy" take on Chandler's works and the noir genre as a whole.

Philip Marlowe, our down-on-his-luck private eye protagonist, is played more naturalistically by Elliot Gould than his previous depictions by Humphrey Bogart or Dick Powell (he spends the first ten minutes of the film buying cat food). Nicknamed "Rip van Marlowe" by the crew, the goal was to center how odd a noir character felt in the contemporary Hollywood climate; he is out of sync with his own time, the only one smoking, skulking, and driving old cars while the rest of California moves on. Zsigmond kept the cameras moving at all times, countering characters' actions to make the audience not viewers, but voyeurs. In direct response to the stereotype of shadowy noirs and to attempt a visual language closer to human sight, Zsigmond utilized post-flashing to create a soft, pastel effect. This is a world where brutal things happen–but it's also California, so it happens in the sun.

Initial screenings were a flop. Distribution was delayed, and the film was almost canned. Feedback from audiences was consistent: this wasn't their Philip Marlowe, this wasn't the mystery they'd expected. Producers realized that billing the film as yet another Chandler adaptation wouldn't work. They had to lean into the differences, rather than attempt to surprise the audience on arrival. An entirely new marketing campaign was launched, and the final release was a hit among critics, taking home awards and top-ten list placements. It would still prove a slow burn among the public, gaining greater appreciation over the years as folks responded to what Ebert felt was its greatest strength, "the way Altman undermines the premise of all private eye movies, which is that the hero can walk down mean streets, see clearly, and tell right from wrong."