

INTRODUCTION

Film noirs were distress flares launched onto America's movie screens by artists working the night shift at the Dream Factory. Some shell-shocked craftsmen discharged mortars, blasting their message with an urgency aimed at shaking up the status quo. Others were firecrackers—startling but playful diversions. Either way, the whiff of cordite carried the same warning: we're corrupt.

The nation's sigh of relief on V-J Day ought to have inspired a flood of "happily ever after" films. But some victors didn't feel good about their spoils. They'd seen too much. Too much warfare, too much poverty, too much greed, all in the service of rapacious progress. Unfinished business lingered from the Depression—nagging doubts about ingrained venality, ruthless human nature, unchecked urban growth throwing society dangerously out of whack. Artists responded by delivering bitter dramas that slapped romantic illusion in the face and put the boot to the thumt of the smug bourgeoisie. Still, plenty of us took it—and liked it.

I took it later, because I grew up in the '60s. Before I could tell Richard Widmark from Richard Conte I knew the films I'd play hooky to watch on the family's Philco: *Thieves' Highway*, *Night and the City*, *Crime Wave*, *The Big Heat*. Any movie with *City*, *Night*, or *Street* in its title listed in that week's *TV Guide*—you could mark me absent from class. I went AWOL from catechism, as well. How could Sister Goetschen compete with Lizabeth Scott or Joan Bennett? The lessons Father McTaggart tried to impart weren't as crucial as the ones instilled by Robert Mitchum and Humphrey Bogart. If they wanted us to understand the Ten Commandments they should have screened *Out of the Past*, *Force of Evil*, *They Were/ Believe Me*, *Sidewalk Street*—come to think of it, the Good Book would make one hell of a film noir.

In the '70s, an ever-expanding catalog of criticism emerged that tried to capture and deconstruct every frame of noir. Essayists argued over what it was and which films qualified. Was noir a genre? Was it a style? Academics tried to pin it down and dissect it. In the process they managed to drain the life's blood out of the films.

This book is an attempt to resurrect these movies for another generation, to make them as vivid as they were when I first saw them—or when our parents and grandparents did.

Of all the varieties of films Hollywood produced during the glory days of

the studio system, noirs hold up best. They've got vivid characters and thematic weight and an inspired vision that preserves their vitality. When they fail to meet that tall order, they've got style and sass to die for. While some studio fare of the '40s and '50s has slid into campiness, or decayed into toothless nostalgia, film noir has kept its bite. Enjoy it for the surface allure, or venture further into the scorched existentialist terrain.

Conventional wisdom has branded these films bleak, depressing, and nihilistic—in fact, they're just the opposite. To me, film noirs were the only movies that offered bracing respite from sugarcoted dogma, Hollywood-style. They weren't trying to lull you or sell you or reassure you—they insisted you wake up to the reality of a corrupt world. Quit kidding yourself. Stand up, open your eyes, and be ready for anything. Prayers go unheard in these parts.

Film noir pointed toward the dark core of corruption in our "civilized" society and our primitive essence. The struggle of the individual to transcend or escape provided the emotional tension. That's the theme that makes noir so compelling for contemporary audiences. The films still connect, even without dissertations on the men and women who made them, or classes on the social pressures that informed their creation. Of all the postures proffered by Hollywood in the twentieth century, noir has proven to be the most prescient. Saddy, we're nowhere near as stylish anymore—but the corruption is thicker than ever.

So lock your door, would you? And hold on. We are taking a little ride. Seatbelts wouldn't do much good, even if we had them. Remember, once we cross the Dark City limits the meter's double and there's no going back.

This trip is going to take us through all the finer neighborhoods. We'll hit Sinister Heights, Shamus Flats, Blind Alley, Viverville, and maybe Loser's Lane—if we make it that far. We'll be hustling in and out of cheap hotels, seedy nightspots, and lonesome roadside diners. You'll get reacquainted with some folks in these dank corners, ready to spill their bitter life story before retreating to the shadows. Be ready to crack wise even as a trickle of cold sweat runs down your spine.

While we're rolling, stay calm, act natural, keep the windows rolled up. Dark City was built on fateful coincidence, double-dealing, and last chances. Anything can happen, and it will.

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Jean Hagen and Sterling Hayden in *The Asphalt Angel*

SHUT UP AND GET IN THE CAR.

- Where are we going, Dix?
- To the pictures.
- What? Are you serious? They'll see us there for sure.
- Let 'em, I don't care anymore.
- Where's the Professor? I thought you were picking him up.
- He's not coming.
- Dix! How can we go through with this? The Professor had the plan, he knew every angle, he said—
- Forget about him! We're improvising from here on. If you don't have the stomach for it—get out.
- What about Tony, the gambler? Is he out, too?
- I'm picking him up in ten minutes. South Street and Third. He'll be there.
- Dix, what happened to the Professor? Is he all right? You two were so close, you'd been together for so many years—
- Leave it alone, Doll.
- He taught you so much, Dix. You always said you felt like a small-time chiseler until the Professor taught you about your—what did he call it? Your . . . manifest destiny! And what about all that French poetic realism, and Jacobean tragedy . . . and Expressionism! You used to love to listen to his theories. Why isn't he here, Dix? Why—
- Because I killed him! I couldn't stand it anymore! I couldn't take another minute of his blather about Judeo-Christian patriarchal systems and structural-semiological judgments. My head was going to explode!
- My God, Dix—what did you do?
- Let's just say I deconstructed him.
- You've finished us, Dix. I hope you know that. We're doomed.
- What else is new? Everybody dies. In the meantime, we'll be able to live again, like real people, not like little symbols on his big blackboard.
- And you think you can pull off this job without him?
- Did the Professor step up for me when Pete Harley tried to kill me that night in Jeffrey's saloon? Was he in the car when I crashed that roadblock upstate? Did the Professor have to tell me where you like to be kissed?
- Give him his due, Dix. He was a great thinker.
- Thinking's overrated.
- Turn here.
- Shut up.
- Don't tell me to shut up. . . . I just might kill you.
- Let me see it coming, that's all I ask.
- There's Tony! See him? Sitting on the running board?
- This stinks. It's all wrong.
- Why doesn't he see us? Why doesn't he look over?
- Could be that bullet hole in his forehead, but it's just a hunch.
- What are you going to do now, Dix?
- We're gonna keep moving, Doll. Once a deal gets queued, that's when things get interesting.
- You're not going back to Dark City, are you? They'll kill you for sure.
- Well, I'm not running away. I'm through with that. What about you? You in or out?
- What else can I do? I've taken so many wrong turns I'm right back where I started. I may as well play it out.
- You could find yourself a rich guy. Break him. Drag him around until his knees are bloody.
- And leave you?
- I didn't say that.
- So it's back to the city, huh? No clear blue ocean, no boozy fruit drinks, no waiters in white?
- Later. I've got some housecleaning to do. Can I drop you someplace?
- Shut up, Dix. Just shut up and drive fast.

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WELCOME TO DARK CITY

LIGHTS DOWN, CURTAIN UP, VOICE-OVER: OBSERVE THE MIGHTY BEAST, MANKIND'S RISKIEST EXPERIMENT. A SPRAWLING, SOARING MONSTER WITH A STEEL SKELETON AND CONCRETE OVERCOAT. SOME BRILLIANT ENGINEERS LEARNED HOW TO PUMP ELECTRICITY THROUGH ITS ARTERIES AND NOW IT LURCHES AND CRACKLES AND SPEWS NONSTOP. ON ITS DAYLIGHT STREETS YOU'LL WITNESS THE MOST COURAGEOUS OF HUMAN ENDEAVORS: THE WILL TO COEXIST. BUT WHEN NIGHT FALLS, HEAD FOR HOME. OR LEARN FIRSTHAND ABOUT OUR TRULY INGRAINED TRAIT: THE DESIRE TO DEVOUR.

A few years back, eminent philosopher Lewis Mumford came to Dark City. Bright guy, little full of himself—he was in town to lecture on his book *The Culture of Cities*. He climbed out of a cab in front of the downtown auditorium and gazed at the buildings looming around him. A knockout beamster whod been hanging nearby rushed up.

"Spectaculat, isn't it?" She gushed, ogling the skyscrapers with him. Even Mumford felt the blood rush a guy gets from a dishy dame.

"The city arose as a special kind of environment," he rambled, "favorable to cooperative association. It was a collective utility that ensured order and regularity in the comings and goings of men, that diminished the force of nature's random onslaughts, and reduced the menace of wild animals and the more predatory tribes of men. Permanent settlement meant not only continuity but security."

"Do tell," she said, nuzzling up to him.

"The big city becomes the prestige symbol for the whole civilization," he pronounced. "Life in all the subordinate regions is sacrificed to its temples of pleasure and towers of pecuniary aspiration."

The dame nodded. A guy leaped from behind a parked car, rapped Mumford's dome with a sap, and nailed his wallet before the philosopher hit the pavement.

A real trouper, Mumford still gave his lecture that night, but veered from his usual script:

"It is impossible here to go into all the perversions and miscarriages of civic functions because of the physical spread and the congestion and mis-planning of the mass city. . . . The physical drain, the emotional defeat of these cramped quarters, these dingy streets, the tear and noise of transit—these are but the most obvious results of megalopolitan growth. For what the metropolis gives with one hand, it takes back with the other: One climbs its golden tree with such difficulty that, even if one succeeds in plucking the fruit, one can no longer enjoy it."

Welcome to Dark City, professor. Mumford probably got the shivers when he watched film noir. One way or another, noir is all about people's struggle to survive in what he calls the "megalopolis." The square-off is usually short, nasty, and brutal. Urban omnipotence casts long shadows over the genre. Its power cowed some filmmakers, who slavishly began their stories by paying obeisance to the city: cameras swooping over rooftops, prowling labyrinthine streets, or simply displaying, with fearful reverence, the overwhelming skyline. It was a ritual, like making a hasty sign of the cross when confronted by the intensity of a cathedral.

In *City That Never Sleeps* (Republic, 1953), the metropolis, with the reverb



indicative of God's voice, narrates its own tale: "I am The City. Hub and heart of America. Melting pot of every race, creed, color, and religion in humanity. From my famous stockyards to my towering factories, from my tenement district to swank Lakeshore Drive, I am the voice, the heartbeat, of this giant, sprawling, sordid and beautiful, poor and magnificent citadel of civilization. And this is the story of just one night in this great city. Now meet my citizens..."

The City introduces us to some of its regulars: jaundiced cop, corrupt businessman, psychotic crook, scheming wife, lovelorn loser, sweet-natured stripper. The apostles.

As in every noir, these folks will careen through a story line with a structure reflecting the city itself. Unexpected intersections. Twisted corridors. Secrets hidden in locked rooms. Lives dangling from dangerous heights. Abrupt dead ends. The blueprints were drawn up by a demented urban planner. Down in the catacombs of the Dark City Department of Urban Development lived a wretched hermit trying like hell to conjure diagrams for a functional metropolis. Problem was, the design had to account for human nature. He was up against an inevitable truth: There are too many rats in the cage and no bond issue or blue-ribbon civic panel will bail us out.

Screenwriters made this murky basement office a regular stop on nocturnal visits to Dark City. They fleshed out his tortured specs and the results were projected into the national psyche: *Whispering City*, *City of Fear*, *Naked City*, *Cry of the City*, *Captive City*, *Street of Chance*, *One Way Street*, *Terror Street*, *No Way Out*.

A FEVER DREAM OF MODERN LIFE erupted from these motion pictures. Something dreadful had crept into the social fabric, especially at the most bustling hubs of urban activity: A wounded cop-killer just escaped from the hospital and is leaving a trail of bodies behind him as he tries to reunite with his girlfriend in *Cry of the City* (Fox, 1948). Across town a tormented loser, guilty of murder, is holed up in a tenement, keeping at bay a squad of trigger-happy cops during *The Long Night* (RKO, 1947).

OPPOSITE: Charles Korvin flees the deadly touch of Evelyn Keyes in *Frightened City*, aka *The Killer That Stalked New York*.



Meanwhile, an unstable young man has escaped from a mental asylum and taken a saloon full of hostages in *Dial 1119* (MGM, 1950). Most of these poor saps had only come into the tavern because the evening commute was stalled at Union Station (Paramount, 1950), where a regular Joe went off his nut and kidnapped a blind girl. He's hiding in the subway tunnels, stalling service and ticking off hordes of angry commuters. As if that wasn't enough to keep the boys in blue hopping, a priest was just murdered at the local Catholic church. There's an APB out for the suspect—the son of a devout parishioner (Madge) and Father Kirkman when he wouldn't give his late mother a lavish burial (*Edge of Dawn*, RKO, 1950).

Even the city's massive monument to mercy, the General Hospital, isn't immune from the societal cancers. The cops send in an undercover man, Fred Rowan (Richard Conte) to probe the violent demise of several doctors. *The Sleeping City* (Universal, 1950) won't rest any easier when it learns what happens on the night shift. Rowan discovers nurse Ann Sebastian (Coleen Gray), whom he's falling for, is the linchpin of a drug smuggling ring.

The Sleeping City was filmed at Manhattan's Bellevue Hospital in 1949, peak year in Hollywood's fascination with crime melodramas. Prior to its release, New



York Mayor William O'Dwyer pressured Universal executives to attach a prologue advising viewers the story had nothing to do with the reality of big city hospitals, in New York or anywhere else.

This dichotomy—between overripe imaginings and disingenuous denial—was the cultural fessie upon which Dark City was built. Many of the stories you'll encounter here are a tantalizing blend of fact, fiction, and myth. Cinematic cocktails, if you will, in which a jigger of creative license and a dash of bitters put a dreamy edge on material rooted in ugly realities, both contemporary and timeless.

Sorting the facts and fictions of this place can be tricky. Consider *Frightened City* (Columbia, 1951; aka *The Killer That Stalked New York*), a more noir treatment of a modern urban plague than *Panic in the Streets* (Fox, 1950), the more heralded Elia Kazan-directed film released the previous year.

In *Panic*, the notion of a metropolis infected with "foreign bodies" was made explicit: The disease is carried into the city from a merchant ship filled with foreigners, one of whom is killed on leave by local crooks, who contract the virus and rapidly spread it throughout the city.

In *Frightened City*, writer Harry Essex threaded a crime narrative through the fact-based story of a smallpox outbreak that threatened New York in 1947. Sheila Bennett (Evelyn Keyes) and her husband Matt (Charles Korvin) run a diamond-smuggling operation. Sheila mails the gems home from Cuba, but unwittingly carries back the smallpox virus. While waiting for the diamonds to arrive, Sheila infects everyone she touches, including a young girl who later dies. Panic grips the city, the National Guard sets up an emergency inoculation program. A crusading health inspector spearheads a manhunt for the source carrier.

The story plays fast and loose with the actual epidemic that gripped New York, which was brief, well-controlled, and not very sensational. It's an example of how the truth was often stretched and artfully manipulated for the sake of a more exciting story. The old "Based on a true story" pitch has always lent authenticity.

But the blurring of reality and imagination sometimes got so extreme it created a strange half-world, a mythological movie metropolis, in which the truth swung

The Sleeping City: Undercover cop Fred Rowan (Richard Conte) learns from Pop Ware (Richard Taber) of a drug conspiracy in the city's General Hospital.

endlessly between what we think is real and what's merely a projection.

Fourteen Hours (Fox, 1951) was another urban drama based on a true story. On July 26, 1938, John Warde held downtown New York spellbound for a day as he perched on the seventeenth-floor ledge of the Gotham Hotel, threatening to jump. The first man at the scene, traffic cop Charles Glasco, valiantly bonded with Warde—consoling him for an anguished fourteen hours—but in the end he couldn't save the troubled man, who leapt to his death.

The film version exemplifies what you'll encounter on your journey through Dark City. It's a tense depiction of one man's despair amid the city's seeming indifference. As Robert Cosick (Richard Basehart) teeters on the verge of suicide, cabbies in the throng below wager on the hour he'll jump. A pair of young lovers meet in the glare of the searchlights. A wife filing for divorce in the attorney's office across the street is inspired to reconcile with her husband.

And in every shot of the distraught Cosick, the skyscrapers of Dark City loom above him and the endless avenues stretch to the horizon—the city's immensity rocking the insignificance of one man's travails. Despite the gallant effort of Officer Dunoigan (Paul Douglas) to talk him down, Cosick falls to his death. In the picture's final shot, a sanitation truck, moving like a lethargic antibody, washes away Cosick's splattered remains as the budding lovers walk past, arm in arm.

At least that's what audiences saw when the film premiered. That very day in New York, the daughter of 20th Century-Fox executive Spyros Skouras killed herself, leaping from the eighth floor of Bellevue Hospital. Devastated, Skouras pulled *Fourteen Hours* from theaters. Resourceful studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck rounded up some actors and a skeleton crew (Basehart not among them) and re-shot a new ending: Cosick at the last moment is whisked to safety.

This confounding waltz between fantasy and reality will be a leitmotif of our tour.

As we travel, be sure not to focus only on the major landmarks. Some of the most gripping stories emanate from the transient hotels in the town's Tenderloin, from within rooms clammy with the residue of spoiled hopes. Where wallpaper sweats from the radiator's steam and neon buzzes incessantly outside the window. Here, Eftimes are reduced to eighty minutes.

Somebody checked out earlier than expected, there's a vacancy on the third floor, ready for another story.



Richard Basehart resists rescue in *Fourteen Hours*.

Force of Evil



SINISTER HEIGHTS

UP THERE IN THE DIAMOND BRACELET OF PENTHOUSE LIGHTS, CHAMPAGNE CORKS POP, FECKLESS WOMEN SQUEAL, AND POWER COURSES MERCILESSLY AMONG THE INSULATED "BUSINESSMEN." DOWN HERE, FORTY FLOORS BELOW, THEIR CLERKS PROWL THE SELLING FLOOR, WHOLESALING FEAR AND MUSCLE WITHOUT CONSCIENCE. BUT THERE ARE CLIMBERS AMONG THE MINIONS. SOMEDAY THE BOSS WILL SLIP AND FALL IN THE TRAIL OF BLOOD MONEY, AND ONE OF HIS LOYAL BOYS WILL EASE THROUGH THE SIDE DOOR AND FINALLY BE UP THERE, ON THE INSIDE, LOOKING DOWN.

When crime flooded America's movie screens in the 1940s there was no such animal as film noir. Cineastes hadn't yet bestowed the academic nomenclature. At the picture factories in Los Angeles and in the boardrooms of Wall Street underwriters, they were called "crime pictures." Accurate, if not as highfalutin. For if there is a common denominator in film noir, it's crime. In *Dark City*, laws—and hearts—are trampled daily.

As popular as crime pictures were after World War II, they were also unnerveing to great suburban swathes of the flinggoing public. In Monroe, Michigan, theater owner J. R. Denniston, a "small exhibitor in the sticks," declared in the March 10, 1951 issue of *Showmen's Trade Review*: "To get our theater programs in proper balance I would suggest production of all crime pictures be discontinued by all producers, and that those they now have on their shelves be withdrawn from the market."

Emboldened by the patriotic search-and-destroy mission of the House Un-American Activities Committee, Denniston requested Hollywood produce "Great instances about business, industry, farming, medicine, and education." In keeping with the Stalinist overtones of this wish list, he concluded, "To get these we will probably have to have a new set of writers, because the people who write the

stories must know and understand what they are writing about."

This diatribe, it should be noted, was motivated by dwindling audiences, not love of country. Better box office would have eased Denniston's mind. But his Babbitism shouldn't be dismissed merely as the whining of an exhibitor crying poor mouth. He knew his clientele, and, in the heartland, citizens were horrified by the barrage of movies depicting urban corruption as a spreading cancer.

During the Depression, the era in which noir germinated, Hollywood sold a glamorous vision of gangsters as renegade bandits. The Cagneys and Robinsons ran wild until the strong arm of our civilized society ran them to ground. Audiences loved flamboyant crooks, even if they did have to end up facedown in the gutter.

Post-World War II crooks were scarier. They weren't after the living wage the Depression nibbled them off; they were after power. They didn't buck the system; they used it. Crime pictures of this era borrowed the trappings of traditional gangster pictures to present a vision of urban America in which the Have-Nots—angry and determined—battled the Haves for control of the gears and levers that operated the modern city.

In noir, crooks are shaved, shined, and high-toned. They've folded their rackets into the capitalist economy. Aspiring to the heights, they work their way in



Old-school racketeer Burt Lancaster learns that crime has moved uptown in *I Walk Alone*, with Wendell Corey and Kirk Douglas.

from the dark edges of society toward the light of legitimacy. They laughed at their scrappy forebears of twenty years earlier, knocking over banks with guns blazing. The noir crime boss has the bank president, and the police chief, in his pocket.

No film hit this nail on the head more squarely than *I Walk Alone* (Paramount, 1947). Producer Hal Wallis, who as studio production chief had helmed a number of Warner Bros.' gangster sagas in the 1930s, became an independent producer after the war and his adaptation of Theodore Reeves's Broadway play *Requiem for a Dream* is a transitional landmark in cinematic crime.

The story revolves around a pair of former bootleggers, Frankie Madison (Burt Lancaster) and "Dink" Turner (Kirk Douglas), who ten years earlier would have been played at Warners by Jimmy Cagney and Humphrey Bogart. They once co-owned a speakeasy called the Four Kings and were low enough on the food chain to haul their own illegal booch across the Canadian border. When a run run

"Once I trusted a dame... now I Walk Alone!"

BURT LANCASTER
and
LIZABETH SCOTT

HAL WALLIS
PRODUCTION

I WALK ALONE

WENDELL COREY
KIRK DOUGLAS
KRISTINE MILLER

GEORGE RIGAUD • MARC LAWRENCE
MIKE MAZURKI • MICKEY KNOX
Directed by BYRON HASKIN

Screenplay by DANIEL TOMBE • Adapted by ROBERT SWANSON
Based on the play by THEODORE REEVES
Produced by HAL WALLIS
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

in 1933 goes laywite (in flashback), the partners agree to split all spoils fifty-fifty whenever they reunite. But Frankie gets nabbed and serves a fourteen-year jolt. Upon release, he discovers that Dink, who never visited him in sit, is living the high life: As proprietor of the city Regent Club, he's a rising player in the muckier margins of cafe society. Frankie's brother Dave (Wendell Corey) even handles Dink's ledgers.

Frankie demands his half of their handshake deal. Dink has no intention of cutting him in. "This isn't the Four Kings," he tells Frankie, "biding out behind a steel door and a peephole. This is big business." Rather than take his old partner for a last ride, as in many a Prohibition-era potboiler, Dink has flunky Dave enlighten his brother as to the new rules of "legitimacy." Well-heeled crooks now have lawyers and accountants to bamboozle their rivals, their enemies, and the law. Douglas strikes as Dave drowns Frankie in a tidal wave of umbrella corporations, holding companies, and ever-dwindling subdivisions. In the final accounting, Frankie's fifty-fifty split nets him a measly \$2,912.

The criminal element of capitalism was rendered more artfully the following year in *Force of Evil* (MGM, 1948). Adapted by Abraham Polonsky from Ira Wolfert's journalistic novel *Ticker's People*, the movie was originally going to be called *The Number Racket*. In Polonsky's hands it became more than an indictment of racketeering. It drew parallels between organized crime and big business, and offered a bleak picture of American industrial might, festering with institutionalized corruption. In Wolfert's words, crime was "the grease that makes things run."

"I wanted to be a success, to get ahead in the world, and I believed there were three ways to do it," explained protagonist Joe Morse in a voice-over Polonsky opted to cut from the film prior to release. "You could inherit a fortune, you could work hard all your life for it, or you could steal it. I was born poor and impatient."

Joe Morse (John Garfield) is a partner in a Wall Street law firm with clients on both sides of the law. He craves the fortune he will reap from transforming the policy racket into a legal lottery. He and his golden goose, gangster Ben Tucker (Roy Roberts), plan to break the small neighborhood policy banks by fixing the July 4th number, 776, to his—paying off a multitude of superstitious bettors and leaving the penny-ante policy boys broke. Tucker will then bail them out—if they agree to be absorbed into an all-encompassing combination under his control.

The snag is Joe's guilty conscience. His brother Leo Morse (Thomas Gomez)



TOP: *Force of Evil*: Joe Morse (John Garfield) presides in his "office in the clouds," where he helps gangster Ben Tucker weave his rackets into mainstream society.

BOTTOM: *Mama's boys*: Sylvia Morse (Georgia Backus) watches son Joe try to convince brother Leo (Thomas Gomez) that there's nothing to lose by joining Tucker's combination.

runs a freelance numbers bank and has no desire to be consumed by the capitalist juggernaut. He likes his policy setup personal and communal; he won't follow Joe to "an office in the clouds." Leo's intransigence strains Joe's partnership with Tucker. Doris, Leo's secretary (Beatrice Pearson), further weakens Joe's resolve by spurring his advances. "You're a strange man—and a very evil one," she tells the cocky lawyer.

"I didn't have enough strength to resist corruption," Joe says, "but I had enough strength to fight for a piece of it." Joe spirals into ethical purgatory following Leo's murder. His resultant moral reawakening is unsatisfying, yet apt, Joe leaps to the authorities with all the confidence of a lost man facing the force of evil.

In content and style, *Force of Evil* was pivotal. Its treatment of a formulaic story—ghetto kid takes a crooked road to the top, only to learn the error of his ways—undercut cliché at every turn. The character's moral agony was suffocating; Polonsky refused to opt for easy answers to complex questions. The film's dissection of the ground shared by free enterprise and criminal rackets invites viewers to connect the dots linking gangster Ben Tucker to corporate raiders and merger pirates of contemporary Wall Street . . . and all the way to the nation's capital.

"I do not write stories to sell a certain morality to the audience," Polonsky has said. "I accept the world and our place in it and I know we have to deal with it. I also know that if we have certain concerns about our nature in it, we're going to pay the price for that. The point of *Force of Evil* is that the price for stealing is Joe's destruction of himself, his brother, and everything else. If you're not willing to pay that price, then you can't live in that world. That's the soldier's attitude: That's how you survive a battle."

Polonsky, like John Garfield, was a Jewish street kid from New York, his head full to bursting with the fervor of Manhattan's 1930s art scene. Both survived the rugged road out of the Depression, lived through the war, and ascended to the rarefied air of Hollywood. "However appalled I was by the industry and its product,"



Abraham Polonsky

Polonsky said, "the medium overwhelmed me with a language I had been trying to speak all my life."

Stylistically, he was one of the first Hollywood filmmakers to attempt a form of cinematic poetry, using imagery, dialogue, and narration in three-part harmony. Revelatory speeches erupt almost unconsciously from the characters. Scenes are composed with the melancholy of Edward Hopper paintings. The editing is often daringly abrupt. Despite the bleakness at the film's core, the storytelling was fueled by creative adrenaline.

Neither Hollywood, nor the public, was receptive. At the same time Garfield and Polonsky were slipping their worldview into the stream of Hollywood publicism, studio heads were slavishly reading a booklet titled *Screen Guide for Americans*, concocted by the doyenne of social Darwinism, Ayn Rand. Published by the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and distributed with the imprimatur of the House Un-American Activities

Committee, the guide instructed: "Don't Smear Industrialism," "Don't Smear the Free Enterprise System," and "Don't Smear Success." Rand advocated the rejection of any script that implied villainy on the part of industrialists.

Imagine her reaction to Leo Morse's blistering anticapitalist tirade: "Living from mortgage to mortgage, stealing credit like a thief. And the garage! That was a business! Three cents overcharge on every gallon of gas. . . . Two cents for the chauffeur, and a penny for me. A penny for one thief, two cents for the other. Well, Joe is here now. I won't have to steal pennies anymore. I'll have big crooks to steal dollars for me."

PARALLELS EQUATING THE STUDIO SYSTEM and the rackets depicted in 1940s crime movies are too rich to ignore. Harry Cohn, boss of Columbia Pictures, even admitted: "This isn't a business; it's a racket." Its link to the mob was a wisecracker named Willie Biuff, a roly-poly racketeer from the same Windy City streets that produced Al Capone, Frank Nitti, Johnny Roselli, and Sam "Momo" Giancana. Biuff

traveled up in the early '30s with George Browne, Chicago head of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) to help the workmen—and to make themselves rich in the process.

They started by busting John and Barney Balaban. The brothers ran a Midwest theater chain and during the Depression they'd drastically cut the wages of IATSE projectionists. Bioff taught Browne mob tactics, demanding \$50,000 from the Balabans. When they begged off, projection rooms had electrical fires, equipment broke, reels were shown out of order. The Balabans coughed up twenty Gs. Bioff and Browne were on their way.

They took their scheme of conquering the movie business to Frank Nitti, "The Enforcer," who'd taken control of the Chicago rackets after Capone was sent up. Nitti turned out the vote for Browne, getting him elected president of IATSE in 1934 (he'd eventually become a vice president of the American Federation of Labor). Bioff was named his "international representative." They roadshowed their extortion act coast to coast.

Nicholas Schenck, president of Loew's, exhibition overlord of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, met Bioff and Browne in a Waldorf Astoria hotel room with a fifty grand payoff stuffed in a paper sack. Schenck waited while Browne counted out the dough. Sidney Kent, president of 20th Century-Fox, walked in and dumped another fifty large on the bed.

Before long, the dynamic duo had a sweet deal in Lotus Land. They took control of the craft and stagehand unions, convincing members that a 10 percent wage hike would be extracted from the studios. But first the rank and file would need to donate 2 percent of their paychecks to a union war fund, in case of strikes. The slush was funneled straight to Nitti in Chicago.

While workers waited for a fair shake, Bioff and Browne were paid off by studio bosses, ensuring there'd be no walkouts. Bioff saw a future in which every Hollywood union was in the fold. "We had about 20 percent of Hollywood when we got in trouble," he testified, once the shakedown flamed out in 1941. "If we hadn't

got loused up, we'd have had 50 percent. I had Hollywood dancing to my tune."

The Feds nailed him thanks to an investigation launched by Screen Actors Guild president Robert Montgomery. Faced with a stint at Alcatraz, Bioff ratted out the whole Nitti gang: Louis "Little New York" Campagna, Phil "The Squire" D'Andrea, Paul "The Waiter" Ricca, Charlie "Cherry Nose" Gioe, and Frank "The Immense" Maritone. Nitti promptly shot himself in the head in a Chicago railyard.

Joe Schenck (Nick's brother), chairman of 20th Century-Fox and the Motion Picture Producers Association, was convicted of paying the mobsters a \$100,000 bribe and was sentenced to three years' hard time. Bioff and Browne pulled longer sentences. It was all symbolic. Trade papers played it as though Hollywood's respectable businessmen had been the prey of extortionists. But as journalist Otto Friedrich noted in his study of Hollywood in the '40s, *City of Nitti*: "Bribery and extortion can turn out to be pretty much the same thing. Money is paid in exchange for a service; both sides agree on a price and a service; the only question is who is corrupting whom."


A ruling in Chicago tax court stated that studios "knowingly and willingly paid over the funds and in a sense lent encouragement and participated with full knowledge of the facts in the activities of Browne and Bioff." Payoffs, it was estimated in court papers, saved the studios as much as \$15 million in wages.




Gangster Frank Nitti killed himself in a Chicago railyard rather than face possible prison time after his role in studio extortion schemes was finally exposed.

all for you....


BODY



and



SOUL



THE ENTERPRISE STUDIOS present
JOHN GARFIELD · LILLI PALMER
"Body and Soul"
and introducing **HAZEL BROOKS** with **ANNE REVERE**

Produced by WALTER WOLFE. Directed by WENDY WOLFE. Released by RKO PICTURES.

After leaving prison, Bioff changed his name to Bill Nelson and moved to Phoenix. But the glibulous gangster couldn't keep his profile low. He hooked up with the Riviera in Vegas—which was tied to the very mobsters he'd set up. He made showy contributions to Barry Goldwater's first Senate campaign. One day in 1955 Willie Bioff was blown apart by a bomb planted in his car, à la *The Big Heat*.

MOST MOVIE MUGULS, LIKE GANGSTERS, were poorly educated, ostentatious, vulgar, power hungry, insecure, and obsessed with being publicly respected. They ran Hollywood with a ruthlessness mob bosses envied. Their mission was to make money for investors; their job was to get power and keep it. Art was rarely invited to the party. It had to crash the gate.

In 1947 John Garfield, freed from contractual obligation to Warner Bros., used his newfound wealth to bankroll Enterprise Studios, an independent production house dedicated to challenging the status quo. To Hollywood's racket bosses, the actor was a brash upstart, cutting himself too big a piece of their pie.

To the artists Enterprise recruited, moviemaking presented a moral quandary akin to the one Joe Morse faced in *Fire of Evil*: Was success worth anything if it came at the expense of integrity? Garfield set the tone, demanding his movies reflect the reality of a world beyond the soundstages. Hence his kinship with Abe Polonsky, whose passion for social justice was tempered by doubts about society's ability to ever achieve it. To them, you fought the good fight, damn the consequences.

Enterprise's first hit was *Body and Soul* (UA, 1947), about a Jewish kid from the Lower East Side, Charley Davis, fighting his way to the top but losing his soul by throwing in his lot with racketeers. Polonsky called his script "a fable from the Empire City," and it was given vivid life by the aggressive direction of Robert Rossen, the visual poetry of cameraman James Wong Howe, and a brilliant performance by Garfield.

Beneath the story's emotionalism was a depiction of crime central to noir: No characters are crusading against the mob's infiltration of boxing. The corruption, as in the subsequent *Fire of Evil*, is already too deeply entrenched. As Polonsky was writing *Body and Soul*, a Senate probe was seeking to expose the reach of racketeers into New York's boxing rings. Polonsky's script intimates that such efforts are futile. Government committees may squeeze token miscreants out of the system's

bloodstream, but a true cleanup is impossible. In Polansky's view, the notion of authority setting things straight, the reliable Hollywood square-up, was laughable at best—and at worst fascistic.

Body and Soul and *Force of Evil* chronicle a world in which it's too late to isolate corruption and root it out. The challenge for conscious people, which Charley Davis and Joe Morse eventually become, is to live with personal dignity in a society where the cancer is inoperable.

Other fight films followed in the wake of *Body and Soul*, solidifying the notion that the sweet science was corrupt, either by its nature or by criminal association. Some were created with strokes broad enough for audiences to see the prize ring as a metaphor for the win-at-all-costs struggle of modern life.

In *The Set-Up* (RKO, 1949), Robert Ryan portrays Stoker Thompson, a journeyman on the backside of his career, whose most cherished possession is the belief he can still win a title. His manager sells him out, assuring a local gangster that Stoker will tank that night's bout. When he tips to the strap, Stoker wages the fight of his life, battering his younger rival into submission. For his trouble, Stoker has his hands crushed, so he can no longer earn a living.

The picture, written by former sportswriter Art Cohn, was adapted from a poem by Joseph Moncure March, and directed by Robert Wise in real time—the seventy-two minutes before, during, and after the fight that are the solar plexus of Stoker Thompson's life. The film was a personal favorite of both Wise and Robert Ryan. *The Set-Up* boiled noir down to its existential essence: This is the way the world works—make your choice and be prepared to live or die by it.

Champion (UA) was also made in 1949 and until a lawsuit sorted things out, it too was called *The Set-Up*. In this film, the savagery of fighter Midge Kelly (Kirk Douglas) is never enabled. He's a rotten son of a bitch with no compunction about letting the mob grease the skids for him, cynically discarding his wife and brother when they try to reform him. It's a relief when Midge finally dies of a brain hemorrhage in the locker room. The Mark Robson-directed film is scathing in its depiction of the public and media making Midge a hero when he's just a thug.

Robson also directed Budd Schulberg's *The Harder They Fall* (Columbia, 1956), a loose account of the career of heavyweight champion Primo Carnera, a lumbering circus strongman from Italy who was ushered to the title by conniving promoters in the early '30s. Once his backers earned sufficient lucre from their freak attraction,



Body and Soul: Shorty Pulaski (Joe Pevney) is killed after challenging his boyhood pal, boxer Charley Davis (John Garfield) to break from his corrupt promoter, Roberts (Lloyd Gough). Everybody knows Roberts had Shorty killed but only Peg (Lilli Palmer) has the integrity to walk away from the high life and easy money.



ABOVE: Robert Ryan about to pay the price for a hard-fought victory in *The Set-Up*. **BELOW:** Humphrey Bogart hates himself for abetting gangster Rod Steiger in *The Harder They Fall*.



he was left on his own to be cruelly exposed: Max Baer knocked him down eleven times in their 1934 title fight. Schulberg, who always wrote with moral indignation, centered the story around jaded sportswriter Eddie Willis (Humphrey Bogart, in his final performance), who sells his soul to gangster Nick Berko (Rod Steiger) by taking a PR job for an operation he knows is crooked. The film ends with Willis calling for a congressional investigation into the mob's influence on boxing.

One of the most famous films to wrestle with sports rackets was *Night and the City* (Fox, 1950). Its protagonist wasn't a boxer, but a scrappy combatant nonetheless. Harry Fabian (Richard Widmark), an expatriate Yank living in London, longs for his piece of the action and hatches a plot pitting him against Kristo, kingpin of pro wrestling. Despite all his frenzied promoting and emceeing, cajoling and buttonholing, Fabian meets the fate that Charley Davis and Stoker Thompson escaped: murdered and dumped in the river.

GAMBLING, OF COURSE, WAS THE UMBILICAL CORD between boxing and organized crime. While fight films of the '30s and '40s took the "fix" as a fait accompli, it wasn't until the peak of the noir movement that movies actually showed the inner workings of gambling rackets. The best of these was *711 Ocean Drive* (Columbia, 1950), in which noir's Everyman, Edmond O'Brien, climbs from sal-sack work-in-groom to sleek-suited kingpin.

Columbia PR flaks raved about how the studio had valiantly pressed on with this groundbreaking film despite constant threats of sabotage and violence. Insurance policies with Lloyd's of London were taken out to guard against the kidnapping of the film's stars. "It can now be revealed that key Los Angeles police officers, instituting security measures that recalled the top-secret activities of the government in wartime, guarded the filming of *711 Ocean Drive* against repeated threats of violence."

The truth: *711 Ocean Drive* was one of the first movies Columbia made—and definitely the best—in a new subgenre of 1950s noir: the exposé picture. Televised congressional hearings into organized crime had captured the public's imagination, and Hollywood sensed a craving for reenactments of what was revealed. A pair of enterprising writers, Richard English and Francis Swan, coiled up to LAPD Lieutenant William Burns, part of the department's legendary Gungster Squad,

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In 1950, while the squad was still in action, it was a big deal for Burns to give these two writers the scoop about interstate gambling rackets. But instead of turning the inside dope into a show about crusading cops, English and Swan told the tale of an ordinary guy—an electronics whiz played by Edmond O'Brien—rising through the ranks to become Mt. Big in an illegal West Coast gambling empire.

This was the biggest show veteran director Joseph Newman had ever handled, and he confirmed that there were obstacles facing the production when the company tried to shoot in Vegas, where a film exposing how the mob bilked suckers was, as you might imagine, unwelcome. The Vegas scenes were moved to Palm Springs. But when the producers staged the film's climax at Boulder Dam, only thirty-seven miles from Vegas, "discouraging" phone calls were placed to the producers.

Columbia turned the situation to its advantage, making it seem as if production of *711 Ocean Drive* was only slightly less daring than the landing of troops at Normandy. Today, of course, gambling is a multibillion-dollar legal racket, making *711 Ocean Drive* and films like it seem like much ado about nothing. It is, however, a terrifically entertaining movie, one that gave Edmond O'Brien a rare chance to play the lead—and have enough wardrobe changes to make Claire Trevor jealous.

SINFONIAL ELEGANCE IS A MAJOR PART OF THE GANGSTER LIFE. Most mobsters had fled the squalor of the slums and were therefore conspicuous about displaying parache around the swells who'd made their piles legitimately. That's why night-club bunnies prominently in Dark City's datebooks. Fronting the typical city speakeasy was a boy born to the booze business, who'd missed last call at the recruiting office but emerged on the other side of the war with an up-and-up establishment, well-equipped to host victory parties. Welcome to Slim Dundee's Round-Up, the

TOP: Pressbook for *711 Ocean Drive* **BOTTOM:** One-time working stiff Edmond O'Brien lives the lush life as a gambling kingpin in *711 Ocean Drive*.

EXTRA 711 OCEAN DRIVE EXTRA

"711" MAKES NEWSPAPER HEADLINES!

Guard Film Studio From Gang Terrorism!



Armed groups opposed the plan when "711 Ocean Drive" was filmed in order to protect legitimate and profitable gambling. These gangster elements threatened against the film. Edmond O'Brien, shown at right, stars in the episode of the \$2,000,000.00 gambling racket.



Charge Underworld Halted Bookie Movie!

Director Alexander Witt, of Wisconsin, a member of the National Service Corporation in International Securities Corp. (Chicago, referred to hereafter, through several agencies) "711 Ocean Drive" as "a shocking commentary" "to be shown" — same with newspaper Frank W. Johnson in Washington.





ABOVE: Robert Ryan about to pay the price for a hard-fought victory in *The Set-Up*. **BELOW:** Humphrey Bogart hates himself for abetting gangster Rod Steiger in *The Harder They Fall*.



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EXTRA 711 OCEAN DRIVE EXTRA

Special 1997 Century-Fox Edition COLUMBIA TRIESTE/DAVE KAPLAN

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Guard Film Studio From Gang Terrorism!



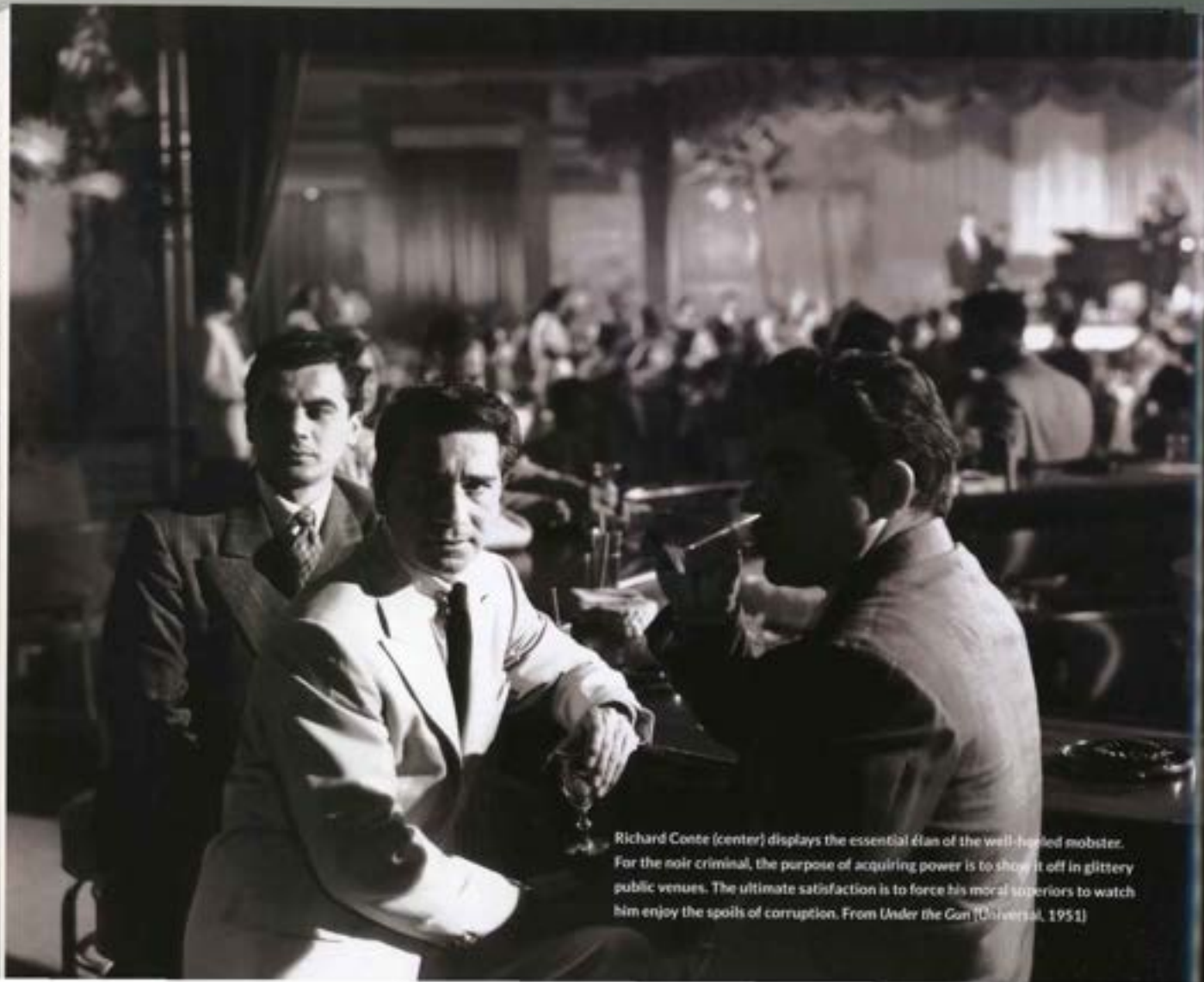
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Richard Conte (center) displays the essential élan of the well-heeled mobster. For the noir criminal, the purpose of acquiring power is to show it off in glittery public venues. The ultimate satisfaction is to force his moral superiors to watch him enjoy the spoils of corruption. From *Under the Gun* (Universal, 1951)

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Sanctuary Club, the Regent Club, the Blue Dahlia, the Kit Kat—ask about the restaurant's two-for-one special.

The club owner's juice within the city's power structure was built on savoir faire and seating strategy: a discreet booth for the shady contractor buying a highball for the district alderman; a stage-side table for the judge who likes an unobstructed view of the seductive chanteuse. It's all showbiz. The bistro boss and his maître d' choreograph a nightly mating dance in which lowlifes and upper crust mingle, their schemes and secrets spilling out amid top-shelf bourbon and torchy ballads.

The nightlife impresario is a fixture in noir: Peter Lorre in *Black Angel* (Universal, 1946), Robert Alda in *The Man I Love* (WB, 1946), Kirk Douglas in *I Walk Alone* (Paramount, 1947), Morris Carnovsky in *Dead Reckoning* (Columbia, 1947), Zachary Scott in *Whiplash* (WB, 1948), Dan Duryea in *Crisis Cross* (Universal, 1949) are only a few memorable examples of the barroom brotherhood. These potentially dangerous nightspots symbolize the halfway point in a criminal's rise from illicit to legitimate business.

The gray area between old-school hoodlum and "organization man" was fertile turf for noir fables. *The Racket*, released by Howard Hughes's RKO studio in 1951, was a remake of the second film Hughes produced, back in 1928. Its central figure, Nick Scanlon (Robert Ryan), is a Prohibition-era enforcer, all grease and muscle and boiling rage. He's a thorn in the side of the cops (represented, in true melodrama fashion, by his boyhood pal), and a liability to the boardroom boys who have moved from running numbers to buying judges and fixing elections.

Scanlon's deeper motives are familial. His younger brother must be given the opportunity to succeed in legitimate endeavors. "I even kept him out of the racket," Scanlon explains to his nemesis, Captain McQuigg (Robert Mitchell). "He could marry anybody in this town—society people even!" Emulating the stoody gentry they despised was a full-time job for mob bosses.

Scanlon has a spiritual kinship with Shubanka, a self-made racket man played by Barry Sullivan in *The Gangster* (Monogram, 1947). Shubanka runs a protection lodge in a nameless East Coast beachfront district. A puffed-up peacock presiding over his two-bit territory, Shubanka believes he's the second coming of Scarface. In truth, he's a paranoid psychotic, his judgment clouded by obsessive jealousy over his beautiful mistress (Belita). As the encroaching syndicate puts the screws to him, Shubanka's insecurities spew out: "I came up from the sewer. Out of the

muck and the mud, I came up by myself. I went to work when I was six—six years old! I was doing jobs for gangsters when I was nine. Bootlegging on my own when I was fourteen. Did anybody worry about me? Did anybody cry his eyes out over me? What do you want me to do—worry about the world? Let 'em sit, every one of them. They don't mean a thing to me. Don't flinch at me, don't you dare look down at me. I'm no crumb—I made something out of myself and I'm proud of it!"

Shubanka is confessing not to the chief of police, but to a teenage girl whose condescending gaze rips him apart. Like Scanlon, he'll be dead before the night is out, removed by tidier "businessmen" parceling out his turf.

VIBILITY IS AS CRITICAL TO DARK CITY'S CROOKS as respectability. In *The Big Combo* (Allied Artists, 1955), the gangster picture is distilled into a sensual battle between saturnine Mr. Brown (Richard Conte) and dogged flatfoot Leonard Diamond (Cornel Wilde). Both men covet the appetizing Susan Lowell (Jean Wallace), whom Diamond has been stalking for months as part of his investigation of Brown's illegal combination.

The themes are insinuated from the start: David Rakain's score bumps and grinds like a burlesque band summoning forth a stripper. Susan flees a boxing match and is pursued through shadowy alleys before being collared by Brown's henchmen. The scene is a visual expression of Brown's sexual dominance. Possession of a beautiful woman is at the root of his quest for power.

Brown and his yes-man McClure (Brian Donlevy) visit the dressing room of Brown's boxer, Bennie (Steve Mitchell), who's lost his bout. Brown gives Bennie a philosophical crash course, using the whipped McClure as case in point. "We eat the same steak, drink the same bourbon. Look—same manicure, cuff links. But we don't get the same girls. Why? Because women know the difference. They got instinct. First is first and second is nobody. . . . What makes the difference? Hate. Hate is the word, Bennie. Hate the man who tries to kill you. Hate him until you see red and you come out winning the big money. The girls will come tumbling after. You'll have to shut off the phone and lock the door to get a night's rest."

Brown then slaps Bennie across his already bruised face. When the fighter takes it, Brown says, "You should've hit me back. You haven't got the hate. Tear up Bennie's contract. He's no good to me anymore."



Sartorial superiority is essential to crook Alec Stiles (Richard Widmark). Undercover underling Gene Cordell (Mark Stevens) helps dress the boss in *The Street with No Name*.

The Big Combo was a different kind of boxing film, with Brown and Diamond, twentieth-century cowboys, slugging it out for possession of the trophy blonde. Diamond may genuinely want to stanch the spread of Brown's corruption, but he'd rather castrate him than incarcerate him. Sexual perversity runs rampant. Susan has sacrificed all her ambitions, held captive by the way Brown lavishes his bankroll, and tongue, on her. Brown gets an erotic charge out of bracing her in a hidden room filled with money and manions. Brown's enforcers Faste (Lee Van Cleef) and Mingo (Earl Holliman) are depicted—through surreptitious suggestion, of course—as gay lovers who use beatings and torture as foreplay. Rita (Helene Stanton), the cop's girlfriend, gives him the lay of the land: "Women don't care how a man makes his living, only how he makes love." Brown scores points against Diamond even by proxy.

"You'd like to be me," Brown tells Diamond. "You'd like to have my organization, my influence, my fix. You think it's the money. It's not—it's personality." He also dominates the verbal sparring match, clipping off some of the best racketeer chatter ever, courtesy of writer Philip Yordan:

"That's Mister Brown to you. Only my friends call me Brown."

"I'm going to break him so fast he won't have time to change his pants."

"You're a little man with a soft job and good pay. Stop thinking about what might have been and who knows—you may live to die in bed."

"If they take you to police headquarters, shoot yourself in the head. It'll make things simpler."

Yordan's tale was the most stripped-down rendering of gangsterism yet. It benefits from the austere direction of Joseph H. Lewis, who plays it like Robert Bresson, if Bresson swung a shot-loaded sap. The poverty of the production is artfully masked by the photography of John Alton. The three had a good time pushing the limits of what was permissible on-screen. In one scene, Conte kisses Jean Wallace's shoulders, then sinks out of the frame as she moans, giving a strong suggestion of oral sex. When the buddy-buddy button men are in hiding, Faste implodes his stir-crazy roomie to eat something. "I can't swallow no more salami," mumbles Mingo, subtly enough to evade the censor's radar. For many writers and directors, crafting subtle and suggestive detours around the Production Code was a clever and defiant game, one that added extra spice to genre programmers.



ABOVE: "It was for her I began to work my way up. All I had was guts. I traded them for money and influence. I got respect from everybody but her.... This is my bank. We don't take checks, we deal strictly in cash. There isn't anybody I'd trust with so much temptation—except myself. Or maybe you."—Mr. Brown (Richard Conte) to Susan (Jean Wallace) in *The Big Combo* **BELOW:** Robert Ryan as Nick Scanlon in Howard Hughes's *The Racket*





JOHN GARFIELD

HE RAN ALL THE WAY

Crime dramas produced in the years following World War II projected a political battle on the nation's movie screens. The hot-button issue in virtually every crime story was the Haves versus the Have-Nots. The distribution of wealth in America was an unresolved *bête noire* from the Depression and a chief ingredient in noir postwar.

The "naturalist" school took hold in Hollywood. Its politics were knee-jerk leftist, steeped in the Utopian Socialism that swirled around New York's influential Group Theater in the 1930s. Crime stories emerging from this creative cauldron saw criminals as products of a flawed system.

No artist exemplified the "naturalist" approach more than John Garfield. While directors and cinematographers are always lauded for developing the noir style, it was Garfield, as much as anyone, who gave the early noir ethos its defiant face and voice. One of his first was the aptly titled *They Made Me a Criminal* (WB, 1939).

On-screen, Garfield was the first true rebel, a Bowery boy who took no guff and hit with the impact of underdog boxing heroes Benny Leonard and Barney Ross. Born in 1913 as Jacob Julius Garfinkel, John Garfield would become for another underclass the kind of larger-than-life symbol Jimmy Cagney was for the shanty Irish. He brought to Hollywood a fiery desire to Make a Difference. In his wake came a caravan of writers, directors, and actors from the New York stage. If the initial wave from Ellis Island who developed the movie business were dedicated to making money, the second wave, of which Garfield was the point man, were committed to making Art. The ideological and economic clash that ensued was a gangland turf war that influenced the angry, pessimistic screenplays of film noir.

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offerings such as *Out of the Fog* (1941) and *The Fallen Sparrow* (on loan to RKO, 1943). But it was his attitude, his way of struggling with moral ambiguity, that would prove most influential. Once operating as an independent, Garfield's projects adopted a darker hue and a heavier weight, including the one-two combination in which he gave his best performances back to back: *The Breaking Point* (DWB, 1950), a version of Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, grimmer and more wrenching than Howard Hawks's flippant 1946 version; and *He Ran All the Way* (UA, 1951), a neglected noir classic that's a harder, more hellish version of a '30s Warner Bros. street-kid crime meller.

In *The Breaking Point*, Garfield plays "boat jockey" Harry Morgan, a war hero struggling to make ends meet. He agrees to smuggling schemes that go horribly wrong. Garfield put everything he had into it, even acting as de facto producer. He showed progressive credentials by dumping Hemingway's casually tossed-off racial epithets and turning Harry's shipmate and best friend Wesley Park (Juano Hernandez) into an African-American; he fleshed out the roles of wife Lucy (Phyllis Thaxter) and "other woman" Leona Charles (Patricia Neal), making them two of the most fully realized female characters in noir. Under Michael Curtiz's commanding direction, *The Breaking Point* was the best Hemingway adaptation ever, its emotional gut-punch putting the source novel's meandering musings to shame.

Warner Bros. rewarded Garfield by dumping the film and its star when he was labeled "Red." His next film would be independently produced, made with loyal collaborators. *He Ran All the Way* is a crime drama that effectively cauterizes its bleeding heart. Nick Robey (Garfield), still living with his spiteful shrew of a mother, is unable to pull himself above a life of petty crime. When a cut-and-dried robbery gets scrambled, Nick panics and shoots a cop. He hides out among the sweltering masses at a public swimming pool, where he latches onto Peg Dobbis (Shelley Winters). Nick charms her into taking him home, where he'll be safe from the manhunt.

Nick ingratiates himself with Peg's folks, but before the night is over he goes berserk and takes them hostage. While the Dobbises sweat out whether they'll survive, Nick veers between envy and derision of their complacent domestic life. He tries on roles as patriarch, big brother, benefactor, and, ultimately, Mr. Right for Peg. He gives her the holdup cash, so she can get



John Garfield drifts into deep water with Patricia Neal and Juano Hernandez in *The Breaking Point*.



John Garfield infatuates and terrorizes Shelley Winters in *He Ran All the Way*.

them a car in which they can elope. The plan, of course, goes haywire. Peg winds up with the .38 and must choose between her dad and Nick.

He Ran All the Way was Garfield's last film and he made it—defiantly—with screenwriters Hugo Butler and Guy Endore and director John Berry, all of whom would be hounded out of Hollywood by the HUAC witch hunt. But of all the Hollywood artists scarred by the blacklist, John Garfield may have suffered the most.

Abraham Polonsky explained Garfield's triumph and tragedy in the introduction to Howard Gelman's *The Films of John Garfield*: "Garfield was a star who represented a social phenomenon of enormous importance for his times and, perhaps, ours too. He lived as a star without contradiction in the imagination of those who loved him for something that lay dormant in themselves, and this was tuned to the social vigor of the time that created him. Naturally, when those times became the political target of the establishment in the United States, Garfield, whose training, whose past were the environment of the romantic rebellion the Depression gave birth to, became a public target for the great simplifiers."

Those simplifiers, Senator Joe McCarthy, Red-baiting attorney Roy Cohn, FBI boss J. Edgar Hoover, HUAC chairman J. Parnell Thomas, and the rest of his Commie-hunting crew were convinced that Garfield was helping Commie vipers infiltrate Hollywood. Garfield, who was never a fellow traveler—and had done more than any other Hollywood actor to aid the war effort on the home front—was invited to clear his Red-stained reputation by publicly turning fink before the committee. He ratted out no one.

As a result, his star was irreparably tarnished and he was exiled to the New York stage that spawned him. Angry and embittered, Garfield died of a heart attack in New York at the age of thirty-nine. Abe Polonsky, who would also lose his career, if not his life, to the blacklist, said that Garfield "defended his street boy's honor and they killed him for it."

If it takes a "SOLDIER'S MENTALITY" to survive in a corrupt world, as Abe Polonsky maintained, then Samuel Fuller produced the basic training manual for Dark City's dogfaces.

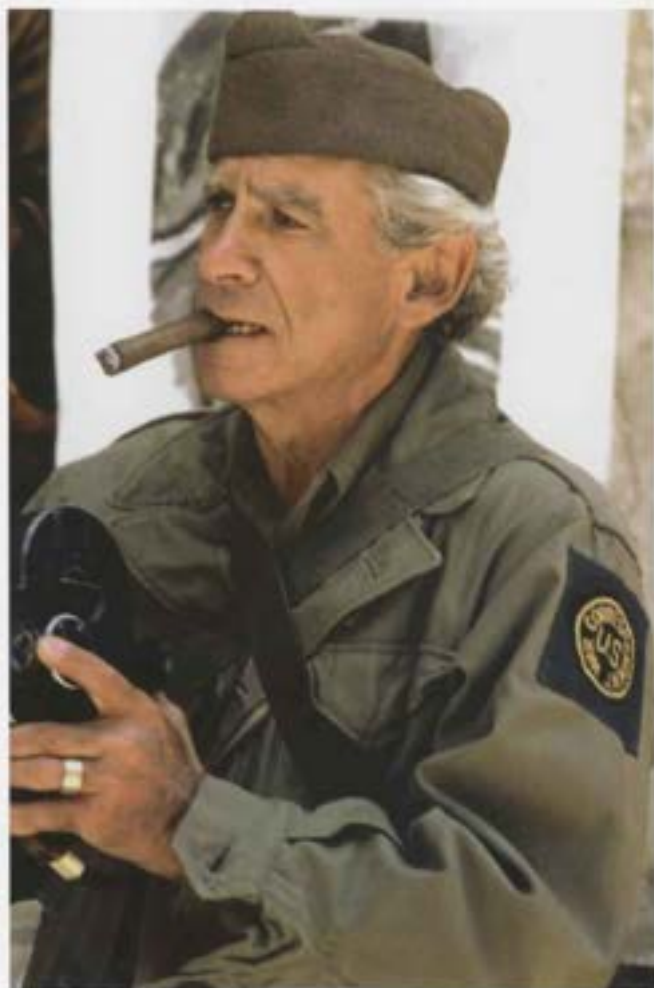
More than any other writer or director, Fuller espoused a philosophy for coping with the creeping venality that, in his view, stretched beyond the city's limits. During the prime years of film noir, 1948-1952, while other directors exposed the underbelly of our urban nightmare, Fuller made westerns and war films that revealed the same criminal element on the frontier and the front lines. Crime was nothing new to Fuller, just another depraved aspect of human nature. Civilization was a pretense: Society is constantly at war, and war, according to Fuller, is "organized lunacy." The challenge is to survive in the cross fire.

Sinister Heights was one more battleground to Fuller. His late noir-era gangster picture *Underworld USA* (Columbia, 1961), presents the Feds and the mob as warring clans of equal resources, firepower, and ruthlessness. Fuller offers no moral judgment, just bitter irony: The hit man who murders a witness's child is also the lifeguard at a public swimming pool the mob runs for PR purposes. As Earl Connors, the syndicate boss, says: "There'll always be people like us. As long as we keep the books and subscribe to charities, we'll win the war. We always have."

Fuller's real concern is for Tolly Devlin (Cliff Robertson), his vengeful protagonist. As a messenger, Tolly sees his father murdered by small-time hoodlums. Orphaned, he falls into a life of crime and ends up in prison, where he conspires to meet one of his father's killers. He squares off from him the names of the others. Paroled, Devlin embarks on a crusade to execute them all.

By this time, the culprits are pillars of the community—as well as syndicate directors. Tolly infiltrates their mob and manipulates the Feds, using each to his own advantage. Spreading disinformation, he sows paranoia among the gangsters. He escorts his father's killers to their deaths, while keeping his own hands clean. Mission accomplished.

But when Connors, the big boss, has Tolly's informant girlfriend beaten, things go sideways. Tolly bursts into the big man's lair, throws him into the swimming



Newspaperman, novelist, filmmaker, storyteller, and indefatigable soldier
Samuel Fuller

pool, and stands on him until he's dead. Conson's bumson man shoots Tolly, who staggers to the same alley where his father died. Love, fatefully, has loused up his mission.

Fuller spins this saga in the bombastic cinematic equivalent of tabloid journalism—lurid, punchy, and sensational—ideas and emotions strapping the viewer in 200-point type. It's a style Fuller grasped early, as a teenage crime reporter for the *New York Graphic*, Manhattan's preeminent "scandal sheet" during the Roaring Twenties. That's where Fuller learned to deliver hard facts with a fill-up of "creative exaggeration."

In 1960 Fuller declined an offer from John Wayne to produce Fuller's dream project, a war film called *The Big Red One*. His reasoning reveals the "soldier's mentality" at the heart of noir: "[Wayne] is a symbol of the kind of man I never saw in war. He would have given it a heroic touch that I hate in war movies. In real combat situations, everyone is scared, everyone is a nervous animal. You can't determine the heroes from the cowards in advance.

"A lot of those John Wayne-type characters came through in combat and a lot of them fell apart. The ones you didn't expect anything from, you'd be surprised what they could do in that situation, when you're cornered. I saw things men did—they might have been called heroes later, but we didn't call them that. You were doing your job. Or you were saving your ass. If you got spotted—an officer has to be one of your witnesses—you get a medal. . . . If you weren't spotted—nothing."

That credo of self-preservation got a full airing in *Pickup on South Street* (Fox, 1953), Fuller's first full-fledged crime drama and one of the best ever produced. It's another war story—a battle between America and undercover Communists—but Fuller's loyalties were with the grunts trying to survive in the margins while the ideological loonies struggle for power.

Skip McCoy (Richard Widmark) lives on the periphery of society—in a shanty teetering over New York harbor, content to eke out a living picking pockets and pilfering purses on the subway. One day he unwittingly lifts stolen microfilm off Candy (Jean Peters), a luscious tart being used, unknowingly, as a courier by her

Commie boyfriend (Richard Kiley). Just like Tolly Devlin, Skip plays both ends against the middle, as they frantically bid for the prison strip of celluloid. When a federal agent accuses him of treason, Skip gives the guy a hearty laugh and a "Who cares?" in response.

Skip winds up aiding the FBI out of love and loyalty to Candy, not patriotism. For Fuller, allegiance to your fellow soldiers is all that matters. When his compatriot, elderly grifter Mo (the fabulous Thelma Ritter), is killed by a Communist agent, Skip retrieves her pine coffin from a barge headed to Potter's Field and pays for a proper burial with his own hard-stolen money. No unmarked graves for Fuller's valiant dogfaces.

Under the enthusiastic auspices of Darryl F. Zanuck and 20th Century-Fox, Fuller shot the seventy-minute *Pickup* in only ten days. Within those limitations, he packed in more storytelling pizzazz than some directors master in a lifetime. In one scene, Widmark knocks Jean Peters out cold with a right cross, then revives her by pouring beer on her face. She comes to, and as he's fingering her bruised lips, they embrace and kiss. In the climactic fight, Widmark yanks Richard Kiley down a flight of stairs, banging his chin on every step. Love scenes or fight scenes, Fuller gave them the lurid gusto of someone born to the crime beat.

Like any good muckraking journalist, Fuller also stirred up controversy. FBI boss J. Edgar Hoover was mortified by *Pickup's* disdain for flag-waving ideology. From the left, Fuller was criticized for joining Hollywood's anti-Communist bandwagon, which was reeling out such things as *I Married a Communist* (RKO, 1949), *The Red Menace* (Republic, 1949), and *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (WB, 1951).

Sam Fuller was Hollywood's equivalent of Skip McCoy: scuffling in the margins, picking his marks carefully, striking quickly, staying light on his feet, and living to work another day. And, like Skip, Fuller faced the world's brutality with a cynical laugh and an eagerness to keep forging ahead like a good soldier, one foot in front of the other. He proved to be the ultimate noir survivor, making crazy independent potboilers into his eighties, all loudly declaring: The world is a madhouse, but *god-damn* it's a thrilling ride.

Richard Widmark and Jean Peters meet "noir" in *Pickup on South Street*.

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THE PRECINCT

THE CAPTAIN'S STACK OF UNSOLVED CASES TOPPLES OFF THE DESK, INTO THE DEAD CHRISTMAS TREE. HE'LL DEAL WITH IT NEXT YEAR. FOUR HOURS LEFT ON THIS SHIFT; THE COFFEE'S BURNED BLACKER THAN TAR. HE TRIES NOT TO THINK OF THE NEW FOLDERS BEING CREATED THIS MINUTE, TOMORROW, ALWAYS. HIS WIFE WANTS TO DANCE IN THE NEW YEAR AT THE GLASS SLIPPER. HE WANTS TO SPEND THE NIGHT BUSTING THE MORBID-UP OWNER AND KNOCKING THAT SLIMY SMILE OFF HIS FACE. COME MIDNIGHT, HE'LL BE DREAMING THE USUAL: OPEN HOUSE IN THE WEAPONS ROOM AND A FREE DAY IN THE STREETS TO SETTLE UP.

The chore of riding herd on Duck City's crime rate fell to either harassed, burned-out cops, or clean-cut, upright federal agents. Distinctions between the two went deeper than their shoeshines and expense accounts. The local boys were only trying to keep their heads above water until the pension kicked in. The Feds were on a political crusade.

Any picture that involved the actions of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had J. Edgar Hoover, figuratively, as its executive producer. He'd been installed as the Bureau's acting director in 1924, presiding over an obscure agency that did little more than chase car thieves who crossed state lines. But, in 1932, national obsession with the Lindbergh baby kidnapping upped the profile of the FBI forever. Fear of kidnapers and bank robbers led, in 1933, to a broadening of the FBI's activities and its arsenal. The tommy gun was soon as synonymous with the "G-man" as it was with Pretty Boy Floyd.

Hoover was a better propagandist than he was a crime buster. He stooped

to rewriting facts to bolster the image of the FBI—and of himself as the nation's greatest lawman. Melvin Parvis, the agent whose pursuit of John Dillinger resulted in the postmortem execution of Public Enemy No. 1, was excoriated from official accounts of the case. In the sanctioned version, an army of G-men dropped the noose on Dillinger, under Hoover's guidance. Parvis quit the Bureau in disgust.

Hoover mythologized the FBI to counteract outlaw folk legends retold in tabloid newspapers and on the screen. His publicist, Louis Nichols, helped J. Edgar hone his image as the czar of justice, able to resist every temptation but one: using the latest gadgetry—surveillance cameras, wiretaps—to lay bare the lives of suspected wrongdoers.

For years, Hoover withheld his imprimatur from crime movies. He wouldn't grant the Bureau stamp to *G-Men* (WB, 1935) because undercover agent Jimmy Cagney patronized a nightclub. But once Hoover saw Hollywood's impact on the World War II propaganda machine, he recruited filmmakers to aid his mythmaking.

Louis de Rochemont had produced the successful *March of Time* documentary series and came with the financial backing of 20th Century-Fox. Hoover figured de Rochemont's facility with factual material would add authenticity to the Bureau's product. Their collaboration, *The House on 92nd Street* (Fox, 1945), was the first

Scott Brady and Roy Roberts lead a team of LAPD officers into the city's sewers to hunt down a clever killer in *He Walked by Night*.





film to take a "semi-documentary" approach to crime. Based on several cases in which Nazi spies were undone by undercover FBI agents, the film was shot in actual locations, using the type of clandestine camerawork celebrated in the film. The Bureau loaned Fox the same surveillance vehicles it employed in the field.

Throughout the film, we see the use of hidden cameras and microphones, two-way mirrors, and microphotography. Americans saw the intensity of the Fingerprint Collection that Hoover hoped would one day contain thumbprints of every citizen. Reaction, to say the least, was mixed. Some marveled at this new level of security. Others saw the foundations of a fascist state.

As the film was ready for release in 1945, the Allied triumph in Europe was imminent. To stay current, de Rochemont transformed the Nazi spy ring into nefarious subversives, easily interpreted as the nation's next enemy, Communists. The secret at the script's core, Project 97, wasn't identified, but when A-bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima weeks before the film opened, the soundtrack was altered to refer specifically to the atom-smashing scientist who had developed those bombs.

This ersatz-documentary approach would influence other crime pictures as well, such as *Bonanzas* (Fox, 1947), *Call Northside 777* (Fox, 1948), *The Naked City* (Universal, 1948), *Walk a Crooked Mile* (Columbia, 1948), and *Walk East on Beacon* (Columbia, 1952), the latter pair finally calling a Red a Red.

More central to the development of film noir were low-budget films released by Eagle-Lion Studios (an outgrowth of Producers Releasing Corporation), which thrust government agents into a grim night-world, devised by director Anthony Mann and cinematographer John Alton.

The best of the federal-agent noirs is *T-Men* (Eagle-Lion, 1948), in which Treasury agents (Dennis O'Keefe and Alfred Ryder) go undercover to bust a ring of counterfeiters. It opens with Treasury official Elmer Irey reciting—with startling

TOP: FBI agent Lloyd Nolan briefs a group of government and military personnel on the bureau's counterespionage tactics in *The House on 92nd Street*. **BOTTOM:** Dennis O'Keefe engages in one of the FBI's favorite activities—wiretapping—in *Walk a Crooked Mile*, one of the first anti-Communist films from a Hollywood studio.

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impres—statistics proving the effectiveness of the Department's crime-busting tactics. Viewers expecting a stiff federal dog-and-pony show were about to be surprised.

As the narration (courtesy of stentorian gasbag Reed Hadley) drones on about the dedication T-men display for the people of the United States, the agents descend into an underworld of horrifying brutality unlike anything Hoover's G-men had faced on-screen before. When O'Keefe, who's infiltrated the crooks' inner circle, must stand by silently as his partner is murdered, crime films hit a new level of cold-bloodedness. Mann and Alton were so adept at rendering the agents' life of loneliness and dread, the jingoistic narration comes off as disrespectful.

The surprising success of *T-Men* influenced the FBI. Its next sanctioned film was *The Street with No Name* (Fox, 1948), directed by William Keighley, who'd done *G-Men* in the '30s. It eschewed the semi-documentary look for more stylized noir elements, but kept the bogus narration and 92nd Street's Lloyd Nolan as a federally fabled father figure.

The same year saw the release of *Walt a Crooked Mile*, the first true Cold War film. It fed the growing anti-Communist hysteria with a tale of enemy spies infiltrating atomic testing laboratories. Producer Edward Small was cashing in on his own *T-Men*, which also starred Dennis O'Keefe. Small started in show business as a talent agent, and O'Keefe remained his primary client. *T-Men* had transformed O'Keefe from a lightweight comedic actor to a square-jawed tough guy, and Small wanted no time exploiting his new persona. Prior to *Walt a Crooked Mile*, O'Keefe played an *homme fatal* in another Small production, the phenomenal 1948 noir *Rare Bird*, created by the same duo—director Anthony Mann and DP John Alton—who made *T-Men* such a revelation.

Small intended to title it *FBI vs. Scotland Yard*, but he dropped *FBI* from the title after learning how meddling Hoover could be. Unlike Louis de Rochemont, Small had no interest in Hoover lurking over his shoulder as a coproducer. When he refused to let the FBI vet George Bruce's screenplay, Hoover demanded all references to the Bureau be removed from the film. Small persisted, asserting that, as a public agency, the FBI was fair game for fictional treatment. In the end, the only change was to the title. Hoover wrote a letter to the *New York Times* complaining that the FBI had not sanctioned the film.

Standing up to Hoover came easily to Eddie Small, who'd had lots of practice



Charles McGraw, who had previously made a striking impression as a hit man in *The Killers* (1946), raised movie cruelty to a new level as Moxie, the counterfeiting ring's torpedo in *T-Men*. Whether threatening to break off Dennis O'Keefe's fingers or nonchalantly frying Wallace Ford in a steambath, McGraw's ruthlessness plumbed frigid depths. Here he watches impassively as Jack Overman throttles O'Keefe.

sparing off with the major studios. In 1942 he threatened a strike against United Artists if the studio failed to meet his terms on a distribution deal. Small served as president of the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers, formed in 1941 to protect independent producers from domination by the majors. His strategy was to make low-budget films with a loyal cadre of talent—*Wall a Crossed Mile* screenwriter George Beuze wrote many scripts for him, and actors O'Keefe, Louis Hayward, and Louise Allbritton were part of his stock company. Small was no slouch when it came to noir. In addition to the classics *T-Men* and *Raw Deal*, his credits include *99 River Street* (UA, 1953), *Wicked Woman* (UA, 1953), *Down Three Dark Streets* (UA, 1954), *New York Confidential* (WB, 1955), and *The Naked Street* (UA, 1955).

While never reaching the heights of *T-Men*, *Wall a Crossed Mile* is an exciting procedural enlivened by location photography in San Francisco and Los Angeles, the hulking menace of a goateed Raymond Burr, and the charm of Dennis O'Keefe. His interplay with costar Louis Hayward makes it something of a "buddy film" as well, with a surprising undercurrent of gay innuendo. Despite his contentious feelings about the film, one can assume that the ending—in which FBI agent and Scotland Yard operative stroll off arm in arm—met with the approval of J. Edgar Hoover and his longtime "companion" Clyde Tolson.

The anti-Communist film Hoover always warned was finally issued in 1952. *Wall East on Bowens* is based on a *Reader's Digest* article ("The Crime of the Century"), written by Hoover himself. His trusted movie colleague Louis de Rochemont paid Hoover \$15,000 for the rights to the story and set a team of writers to work adapting it into a remake of *House on 92nd Street*, with Communist spies sneaking Manhattan Project secrets. Leo Rosten had written original stories for several noirs—*The Dark Corner* (Fox, 1946); *Lured* (UA, 1947); *Sleep, My Love* (UA, 1948); *The Velvet Touch* (RKO, 1948); *When Danger Lives* (RKO, 1950)—but the other writers, Virginia Shaler and Yale classmates Leonard Heideman and Emmett Murphy—were neophytes.

Wall East on Bowens is a Cold War artifact, having little to do with noir. For real noir, consider the story of coscreenwriter Leonard Heideman. This picture gave him a leg up in the movie business, and Heideman made the move to Hollywood. In the mid-'50s he wrote regularly for television, including the anti-Commie series *I Led Three Lives*. In 1955 he married schoolteacher Dolores Hearn and by the end of the decade they had two sons and were living the high life. By 1963, however,

BROUGHT THRILLINGLY TO LIFE BY THE MAKERS OF "CANON CITY"

Savage **TRUTH!**
Stronger than Fiction!

In the watery darkness of the massive sewers that wind tortuously beneath Los Angeles a man flees for his life. Now he stops - waiting, listening, his finger tenses about the trigger of his gun. Suddenly - he whirls - fires blindly into the blackness!

Savage, brutal - this is the killer who has struck again and again - the killer the police have hunted, patiently, skillfully, courageously - relentlessly tying each tiny clue, every shred and strand of evidence into an ever-tightening net.

Now it's closing... they have him cornered again, fighting desperately for his life...
Deadly, defiant, undrained!



FROM THE
BRITISH FILES
OF THE
LOS ANGELES
POLICE

A BATTLE CITY Production
Distributed by COLUMBIA TRISTAR

"HE WALKED
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Heideman was beset by financial problems. One morning, in the midst of a raging argument, Heideman stabbed his wife to death. An evaluation by psychiatrists found him legally insane and unfit to stand trial. He was committed to Aracaleum State Hospital for the criminally insane.

Fourteen months later, doctors declared him cured. Two years later, under the name Laurence Heath, Heideman resumed his television career, writing scripts for *Mission: Impossible*, *Mannix*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Dynasty*, and *Murder, She Wrote*. He remarried twice, and under the name "John Burt" wrote a grueling autobiography—*By Reason of Insanity*—accounting the mental breakdown that led him to murder his wife. Heideman lived until 2007, when, at the age of seventy-eight, he committed suicide by hanging himself. You want noir? That's noir.

The director of *Wall Ear on Boston*, Alfred Werker, had previously directed a genuine and influential noir, 1945's *He Walked by Night* (Eagle-Lion). Richard Basehart plays a killer who uses his brilliance with electronics to evade a police manhunt. It was based on the true story of Erwin Walker, a police dispatcher who had served with distinction in World War II. He'd been traumatized when his signal corps unit was massacred, for which he assumed blame. After discharge, his survivor's guilt worsened. He dwelled in a secret workshop, obsessed with an electronic "project." In 1945, still a stateside Army first lieutenant, Walker began a robbery spree in support of his secret mission, during which he fatally shot a highway patrolman. He later explained he was developing a ray gun that would turn metal into dust, which would force the government to raise soldiers' pay; that would make it too costly to fight wars. The press snuffed an insanity plea and dubbed him "Machine Gun" Walker.

The case captured the attention of writer-producer Crane Wilbur, who'd been writing crime and prison pictures since the early 1930s. He saw a fresh wrinkle in Walker's sad saga—a police procedural ("Ripped from the Files of the LAPD") that focused on the disturbed loner, a one-time cop, lost on the dark side. Wilbur was intrigued by Walker's use of the county's sewer system as a means of transit and escape. *He Walked by Night* ends, after seventy-nine minutes of shadowy foreboding, with Basehart killed like a rat in the city's sewers (brilliantly photographed by John Alton, with several sequences directed by a pinch-biting Anthony Mann).

Playing a small role as a police technician was Jack Webb, who co-opted much of this material to create *Dragnet*, the archetypal TV police procedural, which

combined the righteous attitude of the crusading Feds with the daily grind of lowly footloose.

T-Men's influence was still being felt at the end of the decade, in such low-budget crime dramas as *Trapped* (Eagle-Lion, 1949) and *Southside 1-1000* (Allied Artists, 1950), which both featured Treasury agents going undercover to bust up counterfeiters' rings. Per usual, the villains were the more compelling characters, with Lloyd Bridges looting up the Richard Fleischer-directed *Trapped* and, in a rare twist, Andrea King playing a female crime boss in *Southside*.

All these films shared a Republican view of crime, at odds with the more Democratic Warners-style films that saw crooks as wayward offspring of a corrupt environment. Whenever the Feds went heroes, criminals were rogue parasites, hunted down and exterminated to protect taxpayers from infection.

Now step into authentic noir terrain: *T-Men*, *He Walked by Night*, and the 1949 prison-break yarn *Canon City* were all financed through a silent partnership between Eagle-Lion production chief Bryan Foy and Johnny Roselli, who'd started his show business career as a liaison between the Chicago mob and the Hollywood craft unions. They hired Joseph Breen Jr., son of the Production Code Administration boss, to grease their skids. Roselli had once worked in the Hays office and he reunited with Breen after a federal stretch for extortion. He'd been sent up by Willie Bioff and George Browne, former heads of the corrupt IATSE union, who, as noted back in *Sinister Heights*, enjoyed several years getting rich off studio payoffs.

Roselli eventually left Hollywood to help the Chicago boys establish a foothold in Vegas. He later was a middleman in negotiations between the Mafia and the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro. His career ended on a yacht off Miami, when he was butchered, stuffed into an oil drum, and set adrift by, it's assumed, his criminal colleagues.

FEDS ONLY TROOPED INTO DARK CITY on the heels of interstate racketeers, or other footloose miscreants deemed a threat to national security. Solving crimes perpetrated in the burg itself was left to local lawmen, and, by the early 1950s, the city's station houses were lossy with disgruntled detectives, embittered that their decision to patrol the straight and narrow earned them less than a hundred bucks a week, paltry benefits, and a calloused heart.



Jim Wilson was once a daring thug, doing violence threats

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Wilson does for the easily or get sorted out—his boss sends him on a mission. In tracking down the victim's father,

The trail leads to a woman devoted to Mary a reflection. He promises Mary a death in the city she sends him a

On Dangerous Ground duality of nature script. To find his armor and spurs him, Wilson was the script's Wilson racing Lupino and

LEFT: Cop Dan
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Jim Wilson (Robert Ryan), protagonist of *On Dangerous Ground* (RKO, 1951), was once a decent cop. Eleven years on the beat have hardened him into a marauding thug, doling out fierce punishment to Dark City's denizens. His uncontrollable violence threatens both the department's image and his own career.

"So I get thrown off the force," he barks. "What kind of job is this anyway? Garbage, that's all we handle. Garbage! . . . How do you live with yourself?"

"I don't," his more levelheaded partner responds. "I live with other people. This is a job just like any other. When I go home, I don't take this stuff with me. I leave it outside."

Wilson doesn't have a wife or a family, or the prospect of one. His contempt for the easily corrupted is so strong he acts as solitary judge, jury, and—if he doesn't get sorted out—executioner. Sensing that Wilson is a bomb with a smoldering fuse, his boss sends him upstairs to cool off and bring some city savvy to a mumbant in the sticks. In tracking down a young girl's murderer, Wilson meets his doppelgänger: the victim's father, Walter Brent (Ward Bond), an ignoramus bent on vigilante justice.

The trail leads to the farmhouse of Mary Walden (Ida Lupino), a blind spinster devoted to her mentally ill brother, Danny—who is the killer. Wilson sees in Mary a reflection of his lonely soul. Her trust and faith give him a shred of hope. He promises Mary he'll protect her brother from Brent. But Danny falls to his death in the climactic chase, and, when Wilson guiltily tries to reconcile with Mary, she sends him away, back to Dark City.

On Dangerous Ground injected Eastern philosophy into the cop drama. The duality of nature, both physical and spiritual, is the theme of A. I. Bezzerides's script. To find connectedness to life, the unbalanced man, a destroyer, must shed his armor and accept vulnerability and compassion. Although Mary, the sutured, spurns him, Wilson returns to duty with a more Zen-like perspective. At least that was the script's ending. RKO told director Nicholas Ray to tack on a new finish, Wilson racing back to Mary for an embrace at the fade-out. Ray refused to shoot it, and Lupino and Ryan blocked out the final scene themselves.

LEFT: Cop Dana Andrews ponders a suspect he has accidentally killed in *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. **TOP RIGHT:** Kirk Douglas takes sudden retirement in *Detective Story*. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Robert Ryan routinely abuses suspects in *On Dangerous Ground*.





On *Dangerous Ground* considered the spiritual crisis at the core of police brutality.

A deeper crisis of faith—and a worse fate—confronts Detective Jim McLeod (Kirk Douglas) in *Detective Story* (Paramount, 1951). Like Jim Wilson, McLeod has been made a heartless bastard by police work. He presides over his precinct like a courthouse judge, meting out punishment to everyone—crooks and suspects alike.

He reserves his most hateful third degree for a suspected abortionist (George Macready). The doctor's attorney turns the tables on McLeod, however, claiming

the cop is on a personal vendetta: McLeod's wife (Eleanor Parker) received an abortion from the doctor the previous year. Devastated, McLeod refuses to forgive his wife. Instead, he commits suicide by walking into the firing line of a scared punk trying to escape arrest.

In *When the Siskiwit Ends* (Fox, 1950), cop Dana Andrews beats a suspect to death, then pins the murder on a gangster he despises. It was among the earliest of dozens of 1950s noirs that showed the police not only as fallible and fatigued, but as bust-out sociopaths. Two decades later, the detangled cop would reemerge, unrepentant, as "Dirty Harry" Callahan. By then there were twice as many rats in the cage, and the public, pissed-off and powerless, embraced him as a savior, not a psycho. Where noir typically treated psychopathology as a sad condition, by the 1980s Clint Eastwood's "Dirty" character was worth millions.

The Big Heat (Columbia, 1953) featured a clean-cut version of Dirty Harry, but one just as angry. Uptown critics dismissed it at the time as just another crime potboiler, signifying Fritz Lang's demise as an A-list director. They missed the cold brilliance that electrified genre conventions, an exhilarating union of Germanic fatalism and Wild West ass-kicking.

When corrupt cop Tom Duncan blows his brains out, he leaves a suicide note exposing the death-grip gangster Mike Lagana (Alexander Scourby) has on the city's power elite. Duncan's wife stashes the note, keeping it to blackmail Lagana and keep herself in a style she never enjoyed as a cop's wife. Sergeant Dave Bannon (Glenn Ford), a blue-collar bulldog, gets suspicious and turns up Duncan's mistress, Lucy Chapman, a B-girl who knows where the bodies are buried. Next thing Bannon knows, Lucy's one of those bodies.

Despite warnings from his bosses to back off, Bannon barges into Lagana's mansion. There's art, servants, music: It sickens Bannon. "Cops have homes, too. Only sometimes there isn't enough money to pay the rent, because an honest cop gets bounded off the force by you thievin' cockroaches for tryin' to do an honest job." He vows to bring the big heat down on Lagana.

Insulted, Lagana returns to his roots: His thugs plant a bomb in Bannon's car, killing the cop's wife (Jacelyn Brando). When his boss doesn't go after Lagana, Bannon flips off his badge and loads up his '38. "That doesn't belong to the department," he seethes. "I bought it."

Locked and loaded, *The Big Heat* gallops into the concrete frontier: There

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Bringing down *The Big Heat*: with a shot beard, one hopes, in all the barrooms and brothels of Dark City, Debbie Marsh (Gloria Grahame) settles a score for all the town's B-girls. Confronting corrupt Bertha Duncan, who's living high on the hog off racketeer Mike Lagana's blood money, Debbie informs her, "You know, Bertha, we're all sisters under the mink." She then lets Dave Bannon's borrowed service revolver finish the thought.

are showdowns in saloons, rustlers hiding their time with endless hands of poker, a robber huan devouring territory while tin snats look the other way. And, most critically, there's the whom with the heart of gold.

Debbie Marsh (Gloria Grahame) is the moll of Laguna's troglodyte torpedo, Vince Stone (Lee Marvin). She's a sexy, smart-mouthed, material woman, adrift amid all the macho posturing. After Vince, in a jealous rage, scans her face with boiling coffee, Debbie throws in with the cop, Bannion, true to his moral superiority, never gives in to murderous temptation. But Debbie, already in the gutter, redeems herself by wanting their torments. First she blows the lid off Laguna's empire by blasting Mrs. Duncan—allowing Bannion to retrieve the incriminating suicide note. Feeling her out, Debbie settles up with Vince, administering her own hot java facial.

Debbie dies in the climactic shoot-out. As she longingly looks to Bannion for approval, he eulogizes his dead wife. In the epilogue, Bannion is back on the force, Marshal of Metropolis, waiting for the next Laguna to ride into town.

The film's power is mainly due to two men: author William P. McGivern, a former crime reporter who wrote as many crackerjack crime yarns as anyone, and Lang, whose work is synonymous with noir. His early German films, *M* (Nero-Film AG, 1931) and *The Testament of Dr. Mabius* (Nero-Film AG, 1933), etched the blueprints of Dark City; omnipotent forces dictating the fate of innocent people, uncontrollable urges leading to self-destruction.

Lang fostered the legend that he had stared down the demon in 1933, when Hitler and Goebbels anointed him the "man who will give us the big Nazi pictures." He claims to have immediately fled Germany, his riches repatriated by the Reich. Later research revealed him a master of embellishment. In truth he'd displayed little resistance to the Nazis' rise to power. It was the promise of Hollywood—mixed with fear that the Nazis would betray him, due to his mother's Jewish heritage—that led Lang to surrender his preeminence in the German film industry. Once on Hollywood production lines, Lang became the movies' official Minister of Fear, darning his studio confections with the doom he felt was at the heart of the universe.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STATION HOUSE from upright, upright cops like Bannion and Wilson was another kind of lawman. Bregana propped on the desk,

worrying a toothpick, figuring his angles. This guy could easily be one of the perps cooling his heels in a holding cell. He's from the same neighborhood scrap heap, just figured a badge was the better percentage play. But somewhere along the line, he saw the game was rigged, leaving him a flatfooted schmack, holding nothing but low cards. So he'd fix the game, determined to beat the house.

"So I'm no good," snaps Webb Garwood, one of the dirtiest boys in blue. "But I'm no worse than anybody else. You work in a store, you knock down the cash register; a big boss, the income tax; ward healer, you sell votes; a lawyer, you take bribes. I was a cop—I used a gun."

Webb (Van Heflin) is rationalizing the Machiavellian scheme he perpetrates in *The Prosecutor* (UA, 1950). It begins when he answers a distress call from an affluent married woman reporting a Peeping Tom. Webb's more interested in her, and her ritzy home.

Pretending it's in the line of duty, Webb intimates himself into the life of Susie Gilvray (Evelyn Keyes). They have an affair while her disc jockey husband does his nightly broadcasts (the voice that of uncredited and blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo).

Susie's no femme fatale. She's levelheaded but lonely, unable to resist the cocky advances of the overly attentive cop. When Webb learns she's depressed because her husband is sterile, he hatches a nefarious plan. He reappears as the prowler, coaxing Susie's husband out of the house. He murders him and makes it look like a tragic accident.

An inquest upholds Webb's version, yet Susie's still convinced he's a murderer. But Webb has big plans for their future. He quits the force and sets out to win Susie's trust, persuading her he's a decent guy who just never got a break in this world. He promises to marry her and give her the baby she desperately wants. In exchange, he'll tap her late husband's life insurance windfall, so he can buy a motel in tax-free Nevada and escape the rat race.

Susie caves in and Webb squines her away to his dusty little dream "resort." But on their wedding night she stuns Webb by announcing she's four months' pregnant. He panics—the timing of the baby's birth will be proof of their affair, giving him a motive for killing Gilvray.

In a mockery of the domestic bliss they craved, Webb and Susie set up a bizarre domicile in a desert ghost town, so the baby can be born in secrecy. Complications

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Dirty cop Webb Garwood (Van Heflin) executes his lover's
husband and makes it look like an accident in *The Prowler*.



force Webb to bring in a doctor. Susie finally turns on Webb when she realizes he'll kill the doctor to preserve their secret. She slips the doctor the car keys and her newborn. Webb's in hot pursuit, but the cops are already on the way. His former blue brethren corner Webb and waste him like a wild dog.

Webb Garwood was different from other loosey lawmen: His wild scheme was based on an impatient desire for middle-class ease, more than a need to set the world straight. A swaggering sports hero in high school, Webb figured himself a world-beater. He'd done everything by the book, but the book turned out to be a cheap paperback. If a badge doesn't give you a leg up on a better life, what the hell good is it?

In his first features, *The Boy with Green Hair* (RKO, 1948) and *The Lash* (Paramount, 1949), director Joseph Losey attacked bigotry and prejudice. He'd been honing his social conscience since the 1930s, when he'd worked in the Red-baited Federal Theater project in New York. In Hollywood he cut his teeth directing shorts for MGM's *Crosses Don't Pay* series (one of which, "A Gun in His Hand" [1945], was the genesis of *The Prowler*).

The Prowler: Webb's dreams of material success evaporate when he and Susie (Evelyn Keyes) are forced to hide out in an abandoned mining town to avoid the scandal of her unexpected pregnancy.

In 1950–1951, Losey worked exclusively in noir, combining gritty crime with a "subversive" intellectualism, a combustible mixture typical of many artists in Dark City. His 1951 remake of *M* transposed the criminal underworld of Berlin to Los Angeles, and *The Big Night* (UA, 1951) treated a young boy's passage to adulthood as a noir nightmare. But it was *The Prowler* in which Losey's political antagonism saw an anti-American sentiment: Pursuit of a middle-class materialist lifestyle could lead to derangement. The film's working title, *The Cost of Living*, made such allusions obvious. Today, the "subversive" message seems barely discernible. Garwood's modern-era equivalent is a golden-variety outcast, as played by Richard Gere in *Internal Affairs* (Paramount, 1990) and Ray Liotta in *Unlawful Entry* (Fox, 1992), cop-from-hell remakes of *The Prowler*. To the anti-Communist crowd in

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1951, the filmmakers were undermining American values.

Screenwriter Hugo Butler and Joseph Losey were both named as Communist sympathizers—"Conspirators" in the argot of the day—and blacklisted. Losey's incrimination oddly paralleled that of *The President*: His career was derailed by an informer who, Losey learned later, once had an affair with his wife.

WEBB GARWOOD'S USE OF HIS BADGE AS A SHIELD FOR MURDER was echoed in a 1954 film titled, appropriately enough, *Shield for Murder* (UA). Based on another novel by William (The Big Heat) McGivern, the story reverberates with the same motivations found in *The President*.

Barney Nolan (Edmond O'Brien, who also codirected with Howard Koch) wants to swap his rifle and revolver for a two-car garage and a backyard barbecue. Realizing it will take years of saving—and that he might stop a bullet in the meantime—Barney opts for an easier route: He kills a bagman carrying a \$25,000 payoff and pockets the loot. All in the line of duty, he testifies—neglecting to mention the dough. What busts his play is a deaf-mute who witnessed the murder and sucks up the guts to report it. Nolan assigns himself to the investigation and ends up mauling the guy to cover his tracks.

All sweaty, frantic Barney wants is a suburban oasis for him and his fiancée (Marta English). While Nolan is coming his peers, gangster Paaky Reed is tracking his missing twenty-five Gs. Soon, Barney is on the lam from both crooks and colleagues. After shooting his way out of a public swimming pool, Barney hides out in the unfinished tract home he covets, and ends up riddled with police slugs, dying face-down on the yet-to-be planted front lawn.

There were lots of other dirty cop roles, from high-end studio products like *Rogue Cop* (MGM, 1954), based on yet another McGivern novel, in which Robert Taylor plays a bull whod rather than take mob payoffs than solve crimes, to mellers like *The Man Who Cheated Himself* (Fox, 1951) and *Pushover* (Columbia, 1954), about cops abandoning ethics for exotic prizes (Jane Wyatt and Kim Novak, respectively).

One of the best was *Private Hell 36* (Filmakers, 1954), in which the hood between two cops (Howard Duff and Steve Cochran) comes unglued after Cochran straddles a dead gangster's stronghold of loot and swears Duff to secrecy. Cochran wants to launder the swag in Mexico, then hightail it to the good life with his tooth singer



girlfriend, played by Ida Lupino (who also produced and cowrote the script).

When the dead gangster's partner tries to blackmail them, the pair decides to pull the money from the mobile home where it's hidden (the trailer-park slot of the title). Turns out the blackmailer is their suspicious boss (Dean Jagger), and Cochran is gunned down after wounding his partner, who he thinks ratted him out. Don Siegel directed with typical punch and panache.

THE MOST UNSCRUPULOUS COP in *Dark City* wasn't unearthed until 1958. By then noir had been whitewashed and transplanted to television shows like *The Lineup* and *Dragnet*. But lying low on the usakiers, wallowing in his foul fiefdoms, was Hank Quinlan, whose reign as the "police celebrity" of Los Robles, a pestilent little border town, is tainted by a *Touch of Evil* (Universal).

Directed, starring, and adapted by Orson Welles (from Whit Masterson's novel *Badge of Evil*), the film follows the final days of Quinlan's life, when the car-bomb murder of contractor Rudy Litnekar explodes long-buried conspiracies. Passing through town when the fireworks start is Miguel Vargas (Charlton Heston), a narcotics investigator from Mexico City, on honeymoon with his American wife, Susie (Janet Leigh). Vargas, to Quinlan's chagrin, takes an interest in the bombing, since the victim had crossed the border from Mexico. Meanwhile, Uncle Joe Grandi (Akin Tamiroff), Los Robles' drug lord, plots to ruin Vargas, who plans to send Grandi's brother to prison in Mexico.

Vargas is appalled by Quinlan—a three-hundred-pound pastale of hubris, arrogance, and racism. Part of the big man's duty has been to absorb the sins of the district attorney and the police chief. Quinlan does their dirty work, leaving them clean and dignified while he bloats with venality. In exchange, they follow him like a covey of quail, marveling at his intuitive powers, chuckling in amusement at every affront to proper police procedure.

All the stray plotlines, tangled double crosses, and harid tortures of Susie Vargas by the Grandi clan are embellishments to the core story: how Vargas drives a fatal wedge into the relationship of Hank Quinlan and his partner, Pete Menzies (Joseph Calleia). The cops are like an old married couple who've been together forever. Pete's always doted on Hank, who's never forgiven himself for failing to catch his wife's killer. Hank once stopped a bullet for Pete, and he claims that it's his game leg that



ABOVE: Barney Nolan (Edmond O'Brien) squanders his pension in *Shield for Murder*. **OPPOSITE:** Cops Howard Duff and Steve Cochran succumb to temptation in *Private Hell 36*.

helps him divine solutions to crimes. Out of loyalty to Hank, Pete has been an accomplice to years of bogus police work, helping plant evidence and buying into Quinlan's rationalization that "I never framed anybody—unless they were guilty."

In the rogues' gallery of rotten cops, Hank Quinlan is the most pathetic. He didn't betray the badge for money or social status, as Webb Garwood or Barney Nolan did. He justifies his corruption by *not* accepting the spoils, preferring to look down his nose at the DA and police chief, as he provides the fast convictions that keep the voters happy. As he and Menzies pass through the shadows of Los Robles' pumping oil derricks, he reminds his friend how rich he *could* have been, amid that black gold, if he'd *really* been corrupt—"Instead, all I've got to show for my thirty years is that lousy turkey farm."

Touch of Evil's noir as a three-ring circus. There are high-wire acts (the dazzling



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moving camera shot that opens the film), sleight-of-hand tricks (the single-take interrogation of Manolo Sanchez), outrageous clowns (Akim Tamiroff and Dennis Weaver), scary animal acts (the Grandi boys' torture of Susie), and clever disguises (Joseph Cotten, Mercedes McCambridge, Zsa Zsa Gabor, and Marlene Dietrich all have masquerade cameos). Welles capably plays both ringleader and elephant.

Welles pulled out all the stops to prove that he was still a viable artist and commercial filmmaker. After years of self-destructive shenanigans and creative stutter-steps, this lowly "B" thriller cleared him a path back to the movie business. Here was a man whose first film, *Citizen Kane* (RKO, 1941), changed the grammar of motion picture storytelling and set the cinematic syntax for film noir: the quest for truth in morally ambiguous terrain, the cynical take on the corrupting influence of power, the off-kilter visual style. With *Touch of Evil*, the most influential director of modern times had ended up working for Albert Zugsmith, who would soon move on to such masterworks as *Sex Kittens Go to College* and *The Inevitable Sex Revolution*.

After spending most of the '50s in European exile, Welles had returned to America paranoid, alcoholic, and with the IRS at his heels. He worked as an actor for survival pay. Zugsmith offered him the Quinlan role in what was a starring vehicle for Charlton Heston. In fact, Heston only agreed to make the film because he mistakenly believed Welles was directing. When the actor made that a condition of his acceptance, Welles agreed to direct while taking only his actor's salary.

Quinlan's debasement mirrors Welles's own fall from grace. Like Quinlan, Welles made a career of half-baked convictions, with wild intuition and flagrant grandstanding often passed off as determined work. Like Quinlan, he surrounded himself with toadies who worshipped his brilliance no matter how jerry-rigged. Like Quinlan, he made up outrageous lies about anyone who criticized his work methods or personal habits.

Watching *Touch of Evil* is like drinking vintage wine before it turns to vinegar. The flavor, pungency, and headiness are there, but so is a queasy aftertaste. The filmmaking is intoxicating, at times magnificent, but as the coda of Orson Welles's Hollywood career, it leaves a hangover. Welles could have been the most original talent of the century, but his ego and appetites left his legacy squandered on exhilarating but disappointing productions. He was a hell of a man, but then, what does it matter what you say about people?

"C'mon, read my future for me."

"You haven't got any."

"What'd'ya mean?"

"Your future is all used up."

—Former flame Tanya tells Hank Quinlan
(Orson Welles) the bad news in *Touch of Evil*.



GLORIA GRAHAME

THE FALLEN QUEEN



Whenever a cop or a crook needed solace, he'd troll the Retreat, a bluesy nightspot in the red-light district where a guy could savor thirty-five-cent beer and visions of more intimate diversions. In the rear, in the red leather banquette, waiting for a single kept promise, sits the fallen queen of this demimonde, Gloria Grahame.

Born Gloria Hallward in Los Angeles in 1923, she was descended from British and Scottish royalty. Louis B. Mayer bestowed the new name upon her, perhaps hoping to cast her in the same regal realm as Greta Garbo. Gloria, however, preferred to be a more accessible empress.

In *Blondie Fever* (MGM, 1944), she was introduced with the line, "You're destined to make wise men foolish." Prophetic. Her early specialty was sultriness, tempered by a silly streak. She learned Shakespeare chapter and verse, but if they wanted her to swing her hips and bat her vampish eyes, why not?

Her first foray into Dark City came in *It's a Wonderful Life* (RKO, 1946), the only time director Frank Capra set foot inside the city limits (if only for a frightened fifteen minutes). She played Violet Bick, a sweetly sexy girl who, in Jimmy Stewart's angel-dust-inspired nightmare, becomes the whore of Pottersville.

She secured her position—as actress and B-girl—with an Academy Award nomination for *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947), playing a call girl ensnared in a murder investigation. Director Edward Dmytryk described her as "a serious kind of kooky." You'd be kooky, too, if you'd trained in classical theater, had a wicked sense of humor, a ravenous intellect, and a longing to portray Lady Macbeth—but always ended up in some crib with greasy wallpaper.

Gloria's ticket to the top was the coveted role of Billy Dawn in Columbia's version of the hit Broadway comedy *Born Yesterday*. It fell through when Howard Hughes, tinkering around as the head of RKO, refused to release her from her contract. Judy Holliday won an Oscar in the role; Gloria settled for playing a slinky gambling house girl in the debacle *Macao* (RKO, 1950).

Although she had success with supporting parts in major films—*The Bad*

Gloria Grahame in a publicity photo from *Crossfire*

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and *The Beautiful* (MGMA, 1952), *The Greatest Show on Earth* (Paramount, 1952) and *Oklahoma!* (Fox, 1955)—breakthrough roles eluded her. Dark City became her permanent address: *A Woman's Secret* (RKO, 1949), *In a Lonely Place* (Columbia, 1950), *Sudden Fear* (RKO, 1952), *The Big Heat* (Columbia, 1953), *The Glass Wall* (UA, 1953), *Human Desire* (Columbia, 1954), *Naked Alibi* (Universal, 1954), *Odds Against Tomorrow* (UA, 1959)—a gallery of screw-loose but seductive women, aching to break out of the margins of a man's world, but always tripped up by their own compulsions and insecurities.

In her personal life, Grahame was married and divorced four times, with a list of lovers longer than her film credits. Producer George Englund, an early suitor of Gloria's, explained her promiscuity: "Have you ever seen a litter of kittens feeding at their bowls? There's always one who lifts her head and looks around at the other bowls in curiosity, nudging her head into them to see different things they might have to offer. That was Gloria."

Her life began to take on the noir overtones of her films. Her first starring role, opposite Humphrey Bogart in *In a Lonely Place*, should have made her a star. But in Hollywood, the performance was secondary to the strangeness surrounding its creation. Her marriage to the film's director, Nicholas Ray, was disintegrating and to preclude production problems, Grahame had to sign a contract stipulating that she would accede to all of Ray's demands. The finished film, a bitter meditation on doomed relationships, was a veiled portrait of their hopeless union.

The marriage crashed in 1951, when Gloria's feline curiosity resulted in a sexual liaison with Anthony Ray, her husband's thirteen-year-old son by a previous marriage. Fallout from the incident gave her a reputation for being professionally engaged but personally unhinged. (In his early twenties, Anthony Ray became Gloria's fourth and last husband.)

As producers continued to trade on her sex appeal, Gloria became increasingly insecure about her looks. She had several plastic surgeries on her upper lip, trying to enhance the lush pout she thought essential to her allure. She lifted weights in hopes of enlarging her breasts, which, unlike her mouth, she refused to have surgically altered.

Despite her best efforts, time took its toll. The boys prowling the Retreat began passing her by for younger game. She staved off the inevitable

onstage, but by the 1970s she was discounting the remnants of her sexiness in tawdry horror films.

During her last years, she battled cancer in a holistic, narcissistic way, refusing any treatment that would alter her physical appearance. In 1981, terminally ill, she suffered septic shock after a procedure intended to relieve her pain backfired. She survived a grueling flight from Liverpool back home to New York, where she died in a hospital at age fifty-six.

It was a sad ending, but not a tragic life. In the Dark City district she inhabited, Gloria Grahame left a unique legacy, which included being the subject of noir's most heartbreaking lines (from *In a Lonely Place*):

I was born when you kissed me
I died when you left me
I lived a few weeks while you loved me.



As a nightclub singer hiding out in a border town, Grahame tempts another renegade cop (Sterling Hayden) in *Naked Alibi* (Universal, 1954).