I.B.TAURIS

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TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES

CRIME WAVE

THE FILMGOERS' GUIDE TO THE GREAT CRIME MOVIES

HOWARD HUGHES

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For Clara

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PREFACE

WELCOME TO THE UNDERWORLD

The underworld of crime, the 'city under the city', is a shadowy world, full of unpleasant, untrustworthy people. But for some reason, crime movies hold a special place in cinema audiences' affections. Many of the highest-grossing, most popular US films of all time fall into this category: *The Godfather* films, *Pulp Fiction*, and various stellar, all-action cops and robbers movies, often depicting the perfect crime. Something about breaking the law and getting away with it seems to appeal to everyone. The loveable outlaws *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), incarnated by Paul Newman and Robert Redford, were equally loveable when updated to thirties Chicago conmen in *The Sting* (1973), with equal box-office success.The aim of this book is to discover and enjoy this enduring appeal.

Inspired by Turner Classic Movies' annual *Crime Wave* season, the movies I've chosen for inclusion in this book are seminal Hollywood films, both in their genre and their respective eras. Crime is a feature of so many films, from westerns to horror movies, murder mysteries to historical epics: in fact any film in which the law is broken. As a guide, I've kept within certain genre boundaries, while discussing as many movies as possible. All the films examined in this book take place in the 'real world', and, in one form or another, look at crime fighting, corruption, thievery or vice.

Crime Wave includes the classic gangster flicks of the thirties and forties, often detailing bootlegging, robbery and smuggling: *The Public Enemy*, *High Sierra* and *White Heat*. I also trace the development of the post-war *film noir* style, from *The Maltese Falcon* and *Kiss Me Deadly* to the knowing post-modernism of *Chinatown* and *L.A. Confidential*. There are tough B-movies from the thrifty fifties, such as *The Big Combo*; tales of gangster revenge (*Point Blank* and *Get Carter*) and Quentin Tarantino's genre-referential *Pulp Fiction*. There are heist and caper movies, epitomised by *The Asphalt Jungle* and *Ocean's Eleven*. Also discussed are lone, rule-breaking cops (*Dirty Harry*), buddy cops (*Lethal Weapon*), global crime (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*), blaxpoitation action (*Shaft*) and even a gangster love story: *Bonnie and Clyde*. And of course there are the four great gangster epics, directed by Martin Scorsese, Sergio Leone and Francis Ford Coppola: *GoodFellas*, *Once Upon a Time in America*, *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II*.

Each film is analysed in detail, with biographies and filmographies of key participants, accounts of the films' making (including details of sets and location filming), their critical reception, performance at the US and UK box office and influence on the crime genre. Where appropriate, there are notes on the films'

literary inspirations or references to their historical period. Historical accuracy, particularly in B-movies, is often not one of the genre's strong points, while other directors, notably Coppola and Leone, are scrupulous within their eras.

Two notes concerning the text: firstly, when I refer to film and book titles, the film title is italicised, the book isn't. Thus: 'The Maltese Falcon' for Dashiell Hammett's book, *The Maltese Falcon* for John Huston's film. Secondly, a note on the ratings certification system in the UK and US. The system in the UK is governed by the BBFC: the British Board of Film Classification. Until 1951 the main ratings were simply U (Universal) and A (Adults); in 1951 the X-rating was introduced, for over 16s. After 1970, the ratings in the UK were U (Universal), A (suitable for under-14s), AA (suitable for accompanied over-14s) and X (suitable for 18-year-olds and over). In 1982, this changed to U, PG (parental guidance) and the age bands 15 and 18. In 1989, certificate 12 was added.

In the US, from the early thirties until 1968, films were subject to the strict Hayes Code. After 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) introduced a ratings system: G (general), M (suggested for mature audiences), R (restricted – under-17s must be accompanied), X (no one under 17 admitted). M was soon changed to GP (general audiences, parental guidance suggested) and then to PG (parental guidance). In July 1984, this became: G (general)/PG (parental guidance suggested)/PG-13 (no one under 13 admitted, unless accompanied)/R (restricted, under 17 years need accompanying)/NC-17 (no one under 17 admitted). I hope this helps to clarify any certificates mentioned in the text.

Finally, in these chapters you will find some of the great crime stars, in some of their greatest films: James Cagney on top of the world, Humphrey Bogart pursuing the black bird, Sterling Hayden prowling the asphalt jungle, Lee Marvin escaping Alcatraz, Clint Eastwood feeling lucky, Michael Caine spilling blood on the Tyne, Joe Pesci getting whacked, Robert De Niro being a wiseguy, George Clooney taking the pot and Marlon Brando making you an offer you can't refuse. Accept it, it's well worth the time.

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Thank you also to Andrew Collins, Alex Cox, Paul Duncan and Stuart Maconie, for taking the time to name their top ten crime movies. All their lists are totally different and I'm sure that each of them could easily have named their top twenty crime films – and still had difficulty pruning the list. Their favourites also remind us how many great films have been made in the genre.

Thanks too, to the following people who have contributed to the writing and research of *Crime Wave*: Belinda and Chris Skinner, Alex and Isabel Coe, Nicki and John Cosgrove, Rhian Thomas, Pen Kennedy, Sir Christopher Frayling, Paul Duncan, Gareth Jones, Tom Betts, Ann Jackson, Rene Hogguer, Chris and Roger Brown, David Weaver, William Connolly, Mike Oak and Tracey Mansell, Sonya-Jayne Stewart and Bob Bell, Nick Rennisson, Simon Hawkins and Lionel Woodman.

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CRIMINAL RECORD: AN INTRODUCTION TO CRIME MOVIES

Gangsterism and criminality in the nineteenth-century United States were associated with outlaws in the wild west; bandits such as Jesse James and Butch Cassidy, folk heroes fronting gangs named the 'Hole-in-the-Wall' and the 'Wild Bunch'. But in the east, in the big cities, with their rising immigrant populations, gangs such as the Dead Rabbits, the Shirt Tails, the Plug Uglies and the Roach Guards were fighting turf wars on the streets of New York, as depicted in Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* (2002). Predominant among the street gangs were the immigrant communities of Irish, Italian and Chinese; the Chinese immigrants brought with them their Triad Societies, later renamed the Tongs, secret sects rooted in ritual, which gained a foothold in these nascent cities.

When crime became more organised, in the early twentieth century, it became more prominent. With the puritanical Volstead Act, declaring Prohibition in 1920, the sale and consumption of alcohol went underground and the criminals and bootleggers thrived. Irish and Italian gangsters battled it out for control of New York and Chicago. It was in the latter city that the most famous gangster atrocity

The Untouchables: gangster iconography adorns a fairground shooting gallery; Robert Stack as Tommy-gun-toting Eliot Ness (photograph Clara Hughes).

took place, after four long years of Beer War. On 14 February 1929, five gunmen, some disguised as cops, employed by mobster Al Capone ('Public Enemy Number One'), machine-gunned seven rival Irish gangsters. The victims were members of the North Siders, Bugs Moran's gang. They had met in Moran's bootlegging depot, the North Clark Street garage, to plan Capone's demise, when the killers struck. As a result of the St Valentine's Day Massacre, Sicilian gangster 'Lucky' Luciano organised 'Murder Incorporated', a self-regulatory gangland outfit, which killed mobsters who broke the criminal code. These enforcers thought they were doing the cities a favour. As James Woods's up-and-coming New York gangster says in *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), when told that his form of urban crime is a disease: 'This country is still growing up… certain diseases it's better to have when you're still young.'

CRIME WAVE 30s

The thirties were the heyday of gangster movies, with Warner Bros Studios leading the way. There had been one notable silent crime movie, Joseph Von Sternberg's Chicago-set *Underworld* (1927). In Germany, Fritz Lang had directed *M* (1931), with the criminal underworld and the Berlin Homicide Squad joining forces to track down a child murderer, chillingly portrayed by Peter Lorre. Originally called *Murderers Among Us*, the film was retitled when the Nazi party sensed it referenced their infiltration of society. The killer is described as 'a danger often cloaked in a friendly disguise' and the sense of paranoia, as fear and suspicion spread through the city like a plague, vividly brings Lang's depiction of urban criminality to life. But with the advent of sound, the crime genre really took off in the US, concentrating on the topical subjects of bootlegging, racketeering, gang war, kidnap and murder.

The most fashionable type of early gangster movies was the Broadway crime movie, which looked at the links between the underworld and the theatre world. The relatively recent addition of sound ensured audiences heard their fair share of musical numbers, in films such as *The Lights of New York* (1928), *Tenderloin* (1928 – which concerned bootleggers, not butchers), *Broadway* (1929) and *Broadway Thru a Keyhole* (1933), with chorus girls on the ladder to stardom, mixing with mobsters. The influence of such early musical gangster movies can be seen throughout crime cinema; *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), for example, featured Jayne Mansfield as a tone-deaf gangster's moll, who mobster Edmond O'Brien is convinced can be transformed into a singing sensation.

But in the thirties, a triumvirate of crime films quickly established a tougher side to the genre and ensured its global popularity. Each depicted a criminal's spectacular rise and equally dramatic fall, and all made stars of their leading actors. Edward G. Robinson starred as Cesare Enrico Bandello, alias Rico in *Little Caesar*

(1930). The film ended with the death of Rico on the steps of a church and his classic final line: 'Mother of God … is this the end of Rico?' (which was altered by the censors to 'Mother of mercy' in some prints). Rico was based on Al Capone, who was incarcerated that same year for the less-than-glamorous crime of three years' tax evasion; his defence was that he didn't think he'd have to pay tax on money garnered illegally. The second, and best, of the three crime films was William A. Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931), with James Cagney's dynamic turn as Irish hood Tom Powers, based in part on Bugsy Moran's associate, Dion O'Banion. This also climaxed with the mobster's memorable demise: here Power's trussed-up corpse is delivered to his mother's doorstep.

The third and most controversial of the three was *Scarface, Shame of a Nation* (1932), directed by Howard Hawks and starring Paul Muni as Tony Camonte and George Raft as his coin-tossing sidekick, Guido Rinaldo. Based on the novel by Armitage Traill, it was written for the screen by Ben Hecht and W.R. Burnett, as another thinly disguised biography of Al Capone. Hawks had trouble from the censors concerning the film's violence (one version ends with Camonte being hanged) and the movie was held back for over a year. Hecht was visited by Capone's heavy mob, who had heard it was about their boss. Hecht managed to convince them it was based on other mobsters and the 'Scarface' reference was simply to attract cinemagoers. Capone reputedly liked the film and even bought his own copy.

With the success of these three films, many imitations followed, though few equalled their power. Unlike the conflicting wild-west heroes and villains, these gangster badmen were completely amoral: violence is underhand and treachery rife. A code of honour, which existed in the film versions of the old west, is completely absent from the crime movie. Death comes with a knife in the back, or machine-gun ambush, and there are no rules in the urban jungle. It was ironic that for the first years of the thirties, these men were heroes.

As the decade wore on, James Cagney made two more films now regarded as classics. First he starred in *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938), one of his most popular films. It is a highly moral version of the 'rise and fall' scenario, with a justly famous electric chair finale. Then Cagney released *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), which looked at how economic factors and unemployment following the First World War pushed men into a life of crime. In this period, future crime-movie icon Humphrey Bogart made his name as a supporting heavy, in Warners' films *The Petrified Forest* (1936) and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), forever in the shadow of a star, which rankled with Bogart. There were also many spoofs of the genre, including Cagney and Robinson sending up their own gangster images in *Lady Killer* (1933) and *A Slight Case of Murder* (1938) respectively, while Buster Keaton parodied bootleggers with *What? No Beer?* (1933).

After their success in *Dead End* (1937) and *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938), rough and tumble street urchins the Dead End Kids started a fad for juvenile crime gang films. These ranged from social dramas to knockabout comedies and

horror spoofs. The Dead End Kids' imitators, competitors or spin-off projects included the 'Little Tough Guys' series (see *Little Tough Guy* – 1938, *Code of the Streets* – 1939, *You're Not so Tough* – 1940, and six further adventures), the East Side Kids (stars of 22 features, including *Spooks Run Wild* – 1941) and the Bowery Boys (who made 48 features between 1946 and 1958).

Stringent censorship and the reining in and dismantling of the real gangsters' power saw the on-screen G-men (government agents) fighting back from the mid-thirties onwards, spearheaded by Cagney's turn as James 'Brick' Davies in *G-Men*, based on the book 'Public Enemy No. 1' by Gregory Rogers. Released in April 1935, *G-Men* was a box-office smash and spawned many rushed-out sequels and derivatives: *Public Hero Number One* (1935), *Counterfeit* (1936 – featuring T-men, treasury agents), *Trapped by G-Men* (1937), *When G-Men Step In* (1937) and the western-set *Border G-Man* (1938).

CRIME WAVE 40s

Like everyone from Charlie Chan to Gene Autry, during the war years cinema cops tended to be combating Nazis, rather than their usual gangster opponents. Notable cop movies include *T-Men* (1948) and *Border Incident* (1949), both directed by Anthony Mann. Nevertheless, gangster biopics enjoyed a comeback. Some of the better-known examples include *Lady Scarface* (1941), *Johnny O'Clock* (1947) and *Dillinger* (1945), starring Lawrence Tierney, who was later to become the boss of the *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). Looming over all forties crime biographies and looking down from the top of the world was Cody Jarrett in *White Heat* (1949), given the definitive portrayal by James Cagney, in his most-remembered gangster role.

With the economic cutbacks and pessimism of the Second World War came the popularity of *film noir*, with mysteries, haunted antiheroes and *femmes fatales* to the fore. The male lead in *film noir* was often a private eye or cop, drawn into a spider's web of power, corruption and lies. This suffocating web of intrigue is often reflected in the films' photographic style, with dark shadows and sinister atmospherics, more in the manner of Universal's horror movies or German expressionism. But often, such style was a direct result of wartime thriftiness. The heroes have a fatalistic awareness of their own doom, which suited the films' dark morality tales, often with downbeat finales. The creeping tendrils of mystery often emit from a *femme fatale* (literally 'deadly woman'), who through her own obsessional kismet leads the hero to face his fate. The stories often take place in flashback, and the past tends to be something to be escaped and forgotten, rather than recalled nostalgically. Some of these *noirs* were little more than thin melodramas with a surfeit of style; others have stood the test of time and are perceptive and stylish works of art. Outstanding examples include *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), *The Spiral Staircase* (1946), *The Big Combo* (1955) and *Touch of Evil* (1958).

Humphrey Bogart kicked off the forties by shedding his second-from-the-left, blink-and-you'll-miss-him, bad-guy image by playing what for many is the definitive screen detective: Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). Following *Casablanca* (1942), Bogart returned to the genre with *The Big Sleep* (1946), where he enacted the most famous incarnation of private eye Philip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler's mystery. Chandler himself became involved with the film industry and co-scripted *Double Indemnity* and *The Blue Dahlia*. Other mysteries of the period included *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944) and *The Glass Key* (1942).

The best screen adaptation of Chandler's work was *Farewell My Lovely* (1944 – *Murder, My Sweet* in the US), with Claire Trevor as the murderous Mrs Grayle and former musical star Dick Powell as Marlowe. Much was made of Powell's new incarnation on posters: 'Two-fisted, Hardboiled, Terrific – Meet the New Dick Powell!' *Noir* posters, like their subjects, were very stylish, featuring wispy smoke, the fog of dreams and the past, guns, dames and tangled cobwebs. The *femme fatale* was invariably the most important ingredient in forties crime movies. As the poster to *Farewell My Lovely* stated, 'Forget that Feeling … She's got Murder in her Heart!'

Other forties films had a mobster as the central character, some of which incorporated a *noir* flavour. These included Bogart's transitional *High Sierra* (1941), the Robert Mitchum vehicle *Out of the Past* (1947 – also called *Build My Gallows High*) and *Kiss of Death* (1947 – worth seeing for Richard Widmark's wired debut as murderous Tommy Udo). *Key Largo* (1948) boasted an unhinged performance by Edward G. Robinson, while the 1946 film version of Ernest Hemingway's short story 'The Killers' featured the steamy pairing of Ava Gardner and Burt Lancaster (in his film debut). There was also *Force of Evil* (1949), *Panic in the Streets* (1949 – in which bubonic plague represents the spread of crime) and the cult classic *Gun Crazy* (1949), concerning a pair of Bonnie-and-Clyde-style hoods.

CRIME WAVE 50s

In fifties Hollywood, the success of *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) gave rise to a new breed of urban *noir*, the heist movie. Other examples include *Armoured Car Robbery* (1950), *Crime Wave* (1953), *5 Against the House* (1955 – a casino robbery), *Violent Saturday* (1955) and Stanley Kubrick's justly famous racetrack robbery, *The Killing* (1956). In France, *Rififi* (1955) set a new standard for heist movies, with its silent 30-minute jewel robbery.

There was also renewed popularity in the gangster biography, now using real names yoked to predominately invented narratives. In *The Bonnie Parker Story* (1958), Dorothy Provine starred as the title gangster, according to the posters, a 'Cigar smoking Hellcat of the Roaring Twenties' – Parker's life of crime started in 1932. Other criminals given the big-screen treatment were *Baby Face Nelson* (1958), *Machine-Gun Kelly* (1958) and *Al Capone* (1959). The decade saw Humphrey

Bogart's last work, with *The Enforcer* (1951), *The Harder They Fall* (1956 – his last film), and a return to his villainous thirties roots with *The Desperate Hours* (1955). There were also memorable B-movies from RKO (*Roadblock* [1951] and *The Narrow Margin* [1952]), United Artists (*Kansas City Confidential* – 1952) and Republic (*Hoodlum Empire* – 1952).

The cops were still in evidence, but for a while it was difficult to see whose side they were on. This was a feature of Hollywood cinema in the fifties, which had an uneasy political atmosphere. Big John Wayne moseyed into town as *Big Jim McClain* (1952), an investigator for the House of Un-American Activities, rooting out Communists in Hawaii; *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951) covered similar ground. *The Big Heat* (1953) and *The Big Combo* (1955) were both condemned for their violence. Orson Welles's much-tampered-with *Touch of Evil* (1958) depicted police corruption in a sleepy, sleazy Mexican border town that would have probably benefited from employing a sheriff like John Wayne.

There were some crime oddities in the fifties, with Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) proving to be one of the strangest. Ostensibly an adaptation of a Mickey Spillane novel about the search for a case full of drugs, it was transformed by Aldrich into something very stylish, different and topical. Here a case containing an atomic bomb is used as a metaphor for nuclear war and the end of mankind, creating a new genre along the way: apocalyptic sci-fi *noir*. Following on from the Dead End Kids, juvenile delinquency kept the cops busy across town, with *Crime in the Streets* (1956) and a *Rumble on the Docks* (1956), and reached its height in the choreographed gang wars of *West Side Story* (1961).

The fifties saw several gangster spoofs, though the humour was often rather laboured; only two films really hit the mark. The first was the UK Ealing comedy *The Ladykillers* (1955), with five shifty robbers posing as a classical quintet and planning their heist while staying in a boarding house with dear old Mrs Wilberforce. Among the crooks are Peter Sellers and Herbert Lom, later reunited in the 'Pink Panther' crime series, and the gang's leader, Professor Marcus, played by Alec Guinness. In Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1959), two out-of-work musicians, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, go on the run after witnessing the St Valentine's Day Massacre and hide out in drag, on tour with Sweet Sue's all-girl jazz band, including their 'Jell-O on springs' lead singer, Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe). The film included a humorous cameo by thirties star George Raft as 'Spats Colombo', the gangster on their trail.

CRIME WAVE 60s

With huge TV audiences, cinema audiences dwindled, and most of the best crime entertainment in the sixties was in TV shows such as *The Untouchables*, with Robert Stack as tough-as-nails Eliot Ness, and *Danger Man* (shown in the US as *Secret Agent*), with Patrick McGoohan as John Drake. Such was their popularity that *The*

Untouchables released a spin-off feature, *The Scarface Mob* (1959), while two colour *Danger Man* episodes ('Koroshi' and 'Shinda Shima') were glued together into a feature (released in the US as *Koroshi* in 1966).

In 1962, United Artists adapted Ian Fleming's 'Dr No' for the big screen, with Sean Connery in the lead as British superagent James Bond. The film and its sequels were a huge global success. Bond was a new type of hero – suave and sophisticated: brutal, clever and smartly turned out. He replaced the scruffy private sleuth and the explosive G-man as a new type of wisecracking antihero. In the US, such escapism was an antidote to the early sixties gloom following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The Bond films started their own spy-movie industry. The most successful were a pair of Derek Flint films starring James Coburn (*Our Man Flint* [1966] and *In Like Flint* [1967]), four Dean Martin 'Matt Helm' films (*The Silencers* [1966], *Murderers Row* [1966], *The Ambushers* [1968] and *The Wrecking Crew* [1969]), based on the books by Donald Hamilton, and a very hip resurrection of Bulldog Drummond in the superior, exotic *Deadlier Than the Male* (1967 – and its lesser sequel *Some Girls Do* in 1969). On US TV there was *The Man from UNCLE* (Ian Fleming contributed the name Napoleon Solo to the series), *I Spy* (with Bill Cosby and Robert Culp as the undercover agents posing as tennis stars), *Mission Impossible* (detailing the exploits of the Impossible Mission Force) and *Get Smart!* (a US Bond spoof written by Mel Brooks).

If they weren't trying to emulate the success of the Bond franchise, crime movies in the sixties were dominated by a new kind of European cinema that took the American crime movie as a template. They were spearheaded by the directors of the French New Wave (the 'Nouvelle Vague'). François Truffaut's *Les Quatres Cents Coups* (1959 – *The 400 Blows*) detailed juvenile delinquency in a poetic, moving way. Jean-Luc Godard's *À Bout de Souffle* (1959 – *Breathless*) told of the relationship between a young American woman in Paris and a small-time hoodlum. Godard's science fiction *Alphaville* (1965) satirised French spy movies, such as those starring Eddie Constantine as secret agent Lemmy Caution; Constantine sent up Caution, his trench-coated, chain-smoking antihero, to great effect in Godard's film. But it was Jean-Pierre Melville who created the finest French gangster movies of the decade, with *Le Deuxième Souffle* (1966 – *Second Breath*) and his slow-burning story of a hitman, *Le Samouraï* (1967), starring Alain Delon. Italy also made some distinctive gangster movies, often based on real-life gangsters and bandits: *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), *Wake Up and Kill* (1966), *The Violent Four* and *Day of the Owl* (both 1968). Internationally, even Japan made their own brand of crime thrillers, dubbed 'Yakuzas', the best of which were two films produced by the Nikkatsu Studio and directed by Seijun Suzuki: *Tokyo Nagaremono* (1966 – *Tokyo Drifter*) and *Koroshi no Rakuin* (1967 – *Branded to Kill*).

US crime movies began to show a stylistic and narrative influence from Europe, especially *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Point Blank* (1967), an existential revenge drama

with Lee Marvin. Both these films also highlighted a sudden rise in the US of on-screen violence, in films such as *Johnny Cool* (1963), *The Killers* (1964), *Madigan*, *Bullit*, *Coogan's Bluff* and *The Detective* (all 1968).

In the US, gangster biopics were still popular, from *Ma Barker's Killer Brood* (1960) and *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* (1960) to *The St Valentine's Day Massacre* and the phenomenally successful *Bonnie and Clyde* (both 1967). There was even *The George Raft Story* (1961 – also called *Spin of a Coin*). But these biographies became few and far between and rare seventies additions included Warren Oates as *Dillinger* (1973), *Melvin Purvis – G-Man* (1974 – also called *The Legend of Machine Gun Kelly*) and its sequel, *The Kansas City Massacre* (1975 – both originally made for TV), *Capone* (1975 – with Ben Gazzara in the title role) and *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (1977).

The sixties was the one era when to be an 'international jewel thief' was a valid occupation. Caper films were immensely popular; they were a lighter, more ingenious and less believable version of heist movies such as *The Asphalt Jungle* and *The Killing*. Caper movie escapism began with *Ocean's Eleven* (1960), a ridiculous movie about 11 army buddies who rob five Las Vegas casinos in one night. The trend continued throughout the decade and into the seventies. The best examples include the UK-made *The League of Gentlemen* (1960), Istanbul-set *Topkapi* (1964) and the classic *The Italian Job* (1969). Euro-heist movies include *Operation San Genarro* (1966), *Operation Saint Peter's* (1967), *After the Fox* (1966), *Grand Slam* (1967), *They Came to Rob Las Vegas* (1968) and *The Sicilian Clan* (1969). A rash of flashy US productions included *Assault on a Queen* (1966), *The Biggest Bundle of Them All* (1967) and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968).

CRIME WAVE 70s

The most successful robbery caper at the box office was the multimillion-dollar star vehicle *The Sting* (1973), George Roy Hill's follow-up to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). Paul Newman and Robert Redford played a pair of Chicago conmen (Henry Gondorff and Kid Hooker) out to fleece mobster Doyle Lonnegan, 'The Big Mick' (Robert Shaw), in a cleverly conceived betting scam. Hill's film is now best remembered for the rearrangements of Scott Joplin's rag 'The Entertainer'; a further sequel, *The Sting II* (1983), with Jackie Gleason and Mac Davis in the Newman and Redford roles, hinged on a rigged boxing match.

Undoubtedly the biggest crime box-office hits of the seventies were the *Godfather* Mafia films, *Parts I* and *II* (1972 and 1974), whose influence and success were immense. Significantly, the first film was based on a best-selling novel by Mario Puzo, the producers hoping for a ready-made audience, but the film's success was by no means guaranteed. Moreover, the four Best Picture Oscar winners, 1971–74 were all crime movies: *The French Connection*, *The Godfather*, *The Sting* and *The Godfather Part II*, proving the genre's renewed popularity.

Private eyes were also back in style in the seventies. There was James Garner as *Marlowe* (1969), an update of Raymond Chandler's 'The Little Sister', and Warren Oates as private eye *Chandler* (1971), named after the novelist himself. Robert Mitchum played a period Marlowe in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975) and *The Big Sleep* (1978). Robert Altman's offbeat *The Long Goodbye* (1973) cast Elliott Gould as a down-at-heel, scruffy seventies Marlowe. Altman's film was a precursor to the everyday threat and menace depicted in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), the foremost private eye movie of the decade, with Jack Nicholson as J.J. Gittes, investigating the Water and Power company. All these films included the usual *noir* touches – a *femme fatale* who hires the hero, the dark side of the human psyche, a mystery element – and added a post-modern knowingness to the proceedings; this is particularly true of *The Long Goodbye*, a film that upset many Chandler purists.

The seventies also saw a vogue for thirties and forties vintage stories, with authentic period settings. These ranged from the children's musical *Bugsy Malone* (1976), with Tommy-guns that fire gunk, to comedies such as *Lucky Lady* (1975). There were serious, brutal treatments such as *The Grissom Gang* (1971) and *Thieves Like Us* (1974 – a remake of *They Live by Night* – 1948), and violent crime biographies: *A Bullet for Pretty Boy*, *Bloody Mama* (both 1970), *Dillinger* (1973) and *Big Bad Mama* (1974).

In France, Alain Delon became a big international star, via his retro gangster movie *Borsalino* (1970). The finest Italian crime film of the decade was Francesco

Marlon Brando as Don Vito Corleone, with Robert Duvall as Tom Hagan, his *consigliere* (negotiator and adviser), in Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 hit *The Godfather*.

Rosi's *Cadaveri Eccellenti* (1976 – *Illustrious Corpses*); based on Leonardo Sciascia's 1971 novel 'Il Conteso' (retitled 'Equal Danger'), with Lino Ventura playing Inspector Rogas, investigating a labyrinthine series of murders of the judiciary. Rosi also directed *The Mattei Affair* (1972) and *Lucky Luciano* (1973), topical, fact-based scenarios that chimed with Italian audiences.

The most reliable crime star of the seventies was Charles Bronson, whose films made a fortune worldwide. He was one of the top ten box-office stars from 1973–76; his highest ranking was 4th in 1975, beaten only by Robert Redford, Barbra Streisand and Al Pacino. He made films in many action genres, including several crime movies, often starring opposite his wife, Jill Ireland. *The Valachi Papers* (1972) was based on the real-life 1963 case of Joseph Valachi, Mafioso whistle-blower on the workings of the Mafia. *Violent City* (1970) was a tale of hitman revenge set in New Orleans, and *Death Wish* (1974) was the ultimate vigilante movie. Bronson also made *Cold Sweat* (1971), *The Stone Killer* (1973), *Mr Majestyk* (1974) and *Breakout* (1975). It is a safe assumption that, with Bronson in the title role, *The Mechanic* (1972 – UK title *Killer of Killers*) didn't repair many cars; 'mechanic' is a slang term for hitman.

With the arrival of Clint Eastwood's cop movie *Dirty Harry* and Michael Caine's Newcastle-set revenge thriller *Get Carter*, 1971 was a watershed year for crime movies. The same year Richard Roundtree starred as *Shaft*, opening the floodgates for the blaxpoitation explosion of black action heroes and heroines. *Dirty Harry* was also the epitome of a new breed of crime-busting rogue cops, heralded by the arrival of 'Popeye' Doyle, not on the trail of spinach, but heroin, in William Friedkin's *The French Connection* (1971) and its sequel *The French Connection II* (1975). *Badge 373* (1973) used the same source material as *The French Connection*. A variation of the formula saw Al Pacino as the eponymous unconventional cop in *Serpico* (1973), in the true story of an officer who tried to expose police corruption in the NYPD.

There were several oddball seventies crime fads, such as the minor craze for 'gang' movies, after John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) and Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979). Another craze was the backwood's 'moonshine' cycle, which produced at least one cult movie, Burt Reynolds's *White Lightning* (1973). Reynolds also kick-started the good-old-boy car chase series, with his immensely popular *Smoky and the Bandit* (1977), featuring much burning rubber, impressive stunts and colourful language, y'all.

CRIME WAVE 80s

In the eighties, with cinema audiences on the wane, period gangster films were much less successful than their seventies' counterparts had been. *City Heat* (1984 – uniting Clint Eastwood and Burt Reynolds), the troubled production of *The Cotton Club* (1984 – from the *Godfather* team of Robert Evans and Francis Ford

Coppola) and *The Sicilian* (1987 – with Christopher Lambert as Salvatore Giuliano) struggled at the box office. The ultimate retro gangster movie of the decade was Sergio Leone's labyrinthine *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), with its authentic art design and settings; unfortunately that too died at the US box office. By far the most satisfying period piece of the eighties was Brian De Palma's no-nonsense *The Untouchables* (1987), which resurrected TV's Eliot Ness, portrayed by Kevin Costner, and pitted him against Al Capone, played by Robert De Niro. This was a return to classic form for the genre, aided by Ennio Morricone's powerful score and Sean Connery's Oscar-winning supporting turn as Irish cop James Malone. Experts in their field, the Untouchables were a real organisation – nine agents who in the murky Prohibition-era Chicago police were incorruptible, or 'untouchable'.

Bad guys were well served in the eighties. *Manhunter* (1986 – also called *Red Dragon*) was the first in a series of serial killer investigations culminating in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), with Anthony Hopkins as Dr Hannibal 'the Cannibal' Lecter, who means what he says when he remarks, 'I'm having a friend for dinner.'

Eighties law enforcers were popular too, be they futuristic mechanical policemen in multimillion-dollar productions, such as *Robocop* (1987), or blood-laced B-movies, such as William Lustig's *Maniac Cop* (1988). There were tough cops – Burt Reynolds in *Sharky's Machine* (1981) – and hip loners, such as Eddie Murphy in *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984). Dirty Harry Callahan reappeared in *Sudden Impact* (1983) and *The Dead Pool* (1988). Vigilantism was as popular as ever with grim, flame-thrower-wielding Robert Ginty as *The Exterminator* (1980).

Buddy cop movies were raised to an art form in the eighties. Crime-fighting teams were commonplace on TV, with literally dozens vying for popularity, including *Starsky and Hutch*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Cagney and Lacey*, *Miami Vice*, *The A-Team* and *Dempsey and Makepeace*. On the big screen, we had cops teaming up with crooks – for example, Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte in *48 Hours* (1982). Alternatively, there were cop pairings that were poles apart from one another. By far the most successful example is *Lethal Weapon* (1987), starring Mel Gibson and Danny Glover, initiating the most popular buddy cop screen partnership of recent years.

The big crime biography of the decade was Brian De Palma's remake of Howard Hawks's *Scarface*, *Shame of a Nation* (1932). Adapted by Oliver Stone, De Palma's film, retitled simply *Scarface*, cast Al Pacino as Tony Montana, a Cuban ex-pat trying to make it in the USA, who rises to be a Miami drugs baron. The film looks great (it was photographed by John A. Alonzo from *Chinatown*) and Pacino crackles with tension, but the gloomy synthesiser score and downbeat, unsympathetic characters make the story heavy going, as does its infamously explicit violence. *Scarface*, in its uncut version, is probably the most violent crime film ever made. An early sequence sees Montana and three accomplices arriving at the apartment of a Colombian gang for a cocaine pick-up, but they are double-crossed. Their rival's boss turns out to be anything but a mellow Colombian and revs up his chainsaw; much bloody action ensues. It is the finale that secures the film's

notoriety. Ensconced in his luxury estate, with his own personal bodyguards, Montana waits. A rival drug gang infiltrates the compound and a blood-splattered pitched battle ensues, resembling Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Montana takes on all comers with an automatic rifle until he is blasted with a shotgun. The finale of the original *Scarface* saw Tony Camonte (Paul Muni) dying near a travel sign reading 'The World is Yours'; here, what's left of riddled Montana swandives into his indoor ornamental pool, decorated with a garishly tasteless cod-Art Deco statue, with a globe motif reading 'The World is Yours'.

In France, there was a distinctively French resurgence of cop movies, called *Policiers*, with for example the phenomenally successful *La Balance* (1982), directed by ex-pat American Bob Swaim. But the protagonists are far from the stylishly dressed heroes of their influential sixties and seventies cousins; now they are scruffy cops in blue jeans, wearing Walkmans on their heads instead of Borsalinos. As well as *Policiers*, there was a new New Wave, including such films as Jean-Jacques Beneix's opera-mystery *Diva* (1980) and Luc Besson's cult *Subway* (1985), which were particularly popular in UK arthouses; the *Subway* poster joined Beatrice Dalle's *Betty Blue* as a must-have on every student's wall.

There were many eighties parodies and crime-film comedies, but despite huge box-office grosses, they haven't worn well. *Police Academy* arrived in 1984; its

'The World is Yours': Al Pacino, as Tony Montana, in Brian De Palma's controversial *Scarface* (1983).

massive success inspired countless terrible sequels. *Prizzi's Honor* and *Wise Guys* (both 1986) lampooned Mafia movies, *Tough Guys* (1986) saw two ageing gangsters (Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas) being released from prison after 30 years, into a world that is unrecognisable to them. *Johnny Dangerously* (1984) failed to parody Cagney's *The Public Enemy*, *Dragnet* tried to ridicule old TV cop shows, while *The Naked Gun* began where the much funnier TV series *Police Files* left off, with Leslie Nielsen cast as Lt Frank Drebin, attempting to foil an assassination attempt on Queen Elizabeth during a royal visit to the US. Two sequels followed: *The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear* (1991) and *Naked Gun 33⅓: The Final Insult* (1994).

CRIME WAVE 90s

Crime movies in the nineties were dominated by two filmmakers: Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino. Scorsese, a native New Yorker, had made the highly influential *Mean Streets* in 1973 and returned to the streets with his masterpiece, *GoodFellas* (1990), followed by *Casino* (1995) and *Gangs of New York* (2002). Tarantino directed *Reservoir Dogs* in 1991, which caused a furore on its release in 1992. His non-stop mix of John Woo action, hip culture references, sharp dialogue and the nostalgic pop soundtrack immediately found an audience. The follow-up, *Pulp Fiction* (1994), won the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Tarantino also scripted Tony Scott's lovers-on-the-run *True Romance* (1993) and Oliver Stone's bloodfest *Natural Born Killers* (1994), which saw Mickey and Mallory Knox (Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis) promoted by the media as superstars. Both films marked an MTV-era re-evaluation of Bonnie and Clyde mythology.

In the eighties frenetic Hong Kong crime films, directed by John Woo and Ringo Lam, gained massive cult popularity worldwide and made a star of Chow Yun Fat. In the nineties Woo made *Hard Boiled* (1992) in Hong Kong, then went to the US for *Broken Arrow* (1996), detailing the theft of a stealth bomber, and *Face/Off* (1997), one of the most bizarre Hollywood crime films of recent years. Here, FBI agent Sean Archer (John Travolta) tracks down Castor Troy (Nicholas Cage), who shot his son five years previously. During the manhunt they literally change faces, but in a psychological twist, they actually swap lives, with the cop trapped in prison at one point, unable to prove his identity.

Crime biography took an interesting twist with the comic book *Dick Tracy* (1990), featuring heavily made-up actors as cartoon characters. It starred Warren Beatty as Tracy, Madonna as singer Breathless Mahoney and Al Pacino as gangster Big Boy Caprice. Beatty also appeared in *Bugsy* (1991), as the title gangster, Bugsy Siegel. In the UK, Ronnie and Reggie Kray got the big-screen gangster treatment with *The Krays* (1990), a tale of the terrifying London mobster brothers, played by Gary and Martin Kemp, from eighties 'new romantics' Spandau Ballet.

The nineties saw the release of *Con Air* (1997), an airborne reworking of *Riot in Cell Block 11*, and Walter Hill's attempt at 'Red Harvest', *Last Man Standing* (1996). More interesting was the dark, claustrophobic atmosphere of *Copland* (1997), with Sylvester Stallone as a small-fry cop trying to swim with the big fish in the city, as corruption permeates; a strong cast included Harvey Keitel, Robert De Niro and Ray Liotta. *Boyz 'N the Hood* (1991) was *The Public Enemy* for the rap generation; in fact the most famous eighties rap act was named Public Enemy.

Pacino followed the final instalment of the *Godfather* story, *The Godfather Part III* (1990), with *Carlito's Way* (1993) and *Donnie Brasco* (1997). *Carlito's Way*, another gangster biography directed by *Scarface*'s Brian De Palma, saw Pacino cast as seventies Puerto Rican mobster Carlito Brigante and Sean Penn as his lawyer, David Kleinfeld (wearing what appears to be an Art Garfunkle wig). *Donnie Brasco* (1997) was based on a true story; Johnny Depp is the title character, actually Joe Pistone, an undercover FBI man, who is taught the ways of the mob by Pacino's Lefty Ruggiero.

Undoubtedly the most anticipated crime pairing since Bonnie met Clyde saw Robert De Niro and Al Pacino sharing the bill in Michael Mann's modern crime thriller *Heat* (1995 – a remake of his own TV movie, *L.A. Takedown* [1989]), filmed in an ultra-stylish, steely blue Los Angeles. *Heat* features the least subtle heist in crime movie history, with De Niro and company ramming an articulated lorry cab into the side of the targeted armoured car, which impacts with such force that the armoured car rolls onto its side. De Niro played Neil McCauley, a robber out for one last job; Pacino is his cop nemesis, Vincent Hanna, with a wife who is permanently stoned on grass and Prozac. *Heat* features many such personal problems: marriages break down, stepdaughters attempt suicide and families fracture. De Niro and Pacino share two scenes together: the central dialogue between McCauley and Hanna in a coffee shop, in which the pair grudgingly acknowledge mutual respect, and the final shootout near Los Angeles airport. Mann also stages an incredible firefight following a bungled bank robbery: Pacino and his heavily armed squad ambush McCauley and his three-man gang on the streets of Los Angeles; only McCauley and gang member Chris Shiherlis (Val Kilmer) escape. Pity the bystanders in this fiery exchange, as all the participants are wearing bulletproof vests. The heavy artillery on display in this machine-gun shootout and Mann's fluid camerawork, taking the audience to the heart of the firestorm, seems part bullet-ridden *First Blood*, part jumpy Kennedy assassination footage – 'criminal vérité' for the nineties. *Heat* is enhanced by an eerie score, composed by Elliot Goldenthal and performed by the Kronos Quartet.

The finest crime movie of the nineties was Curtis Hanson's fifties period *noir*, *L.A.Confidential* (1997), an adaptation of James Ellroy's terse, hard-boiled novel, which threw politics, tabloid journalism, celebrity, murder and corruption into the Los Angeles melting pot. There were also several blockbusting thrillers and their rolling sequels, which used hijacking and robbery in a broader action milieu,

including *Die Hard* (1988), *Die Hard 2* (1990), *Speed* (1994), *Die Hard With a Vengeance* (1995), *Mission: Impossible* (1996), *Speed 2: Cruise Control* (1997) and *Mission: Impossible 2* (2000). These films rely heavily on spectacular stunts and CGI special effects to engage the audience's attention. For example, in *Speed*, a superior example of the genre, Keanu Reeves is pitted against extortionist Dennis Hopper, who demands a $3.7 million ransom from the city of Los Angeles. He has planted a bomb on a bus, which will detonate if the bus's speed isn't maintained at a steady 50 mph. Reeves and Sandra Bullock take the wheel for a nail-biting ride.

European crime movies produced *La Femme Nikita* (1990), Luc Besson's story of a female assassin. Besson's US film, *Leon* (1994), saw hitman Jean Reno teaming up with 12-year-old Natalie Portman to gain revenge on the murderer of Portman's father, a corrupt cop, played by Gary Oldman. In the UK there was renewed popularity in domestic crime movies, with the success of Guy Richie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and *Snatch* (2000). *Lock, Stock* mixed the brutality of *Get Carter* and the Cockney charm of *The Italian Job*, and even spawned a short-lived TV show, with episodes entitled 'Lock, Stock and Four Stolen Hooves' and 'Lock, Stock and A Fistful of Jack and Jills'. *Snatch* was better, featuring protagonists with descriptive names such as Turkish, Frankie Four Fingers and Brick Top, in a tale of jewel heists and fixed boxing matches: 'Stealing Stones and Breaking Bones' ran the tagline. Richie has since followed this with the crime drama *Revolver* (2005).

CRIME WAVE: 21st-CENTURY COPS

Entering the new century, crime films continue to diversify. They keep surprising audiences with further twists and turns, proving how flexible, adaptable and recyclable the genre is. To take some disparate examples: *Gone in 60 Seconds* (2000) featured Nicholas Cage stealing cars, but like the high-octane remake of *The Italian Job* (2003), the film was running on empty. There was the easygoing charm of Steven Spielberg's *Catch Me if You Can* (2002), with a con artist (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) chased by Tom Hanks's resolute FBI man. Shane Black, the writer of *Lethal Weapon*, directed the neo-*noir Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005), starring Val Kilmer and Robert Downey Jnr, while the same year saw the release of *Sin City* (2005), a monochrome, violent comic strip *noir* starring Bruce Willis, Clive Owen and Mickey Rourke, and based on Frank Miller's urban gothic work. *Sexy Beast* (2000) features a Ronnie Biggs-style British crook hiding out in Southern Spain. Here, Ray Winston's sunbathing is interrupted by the arrival of Ben Kingsley, as Don Logan, possibly the most offensive and frightening British crook ever to appear in a crime movie; it is little wonder Winston suffers nightmares about being machine-gunned by an evil-looking giant rabbit.

The Colombian/US co-production *Maria Full of Grace* (2004) saw the teenage Colombian heroine smuggling condoms full of heroin in her stomach. Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000), based on a UK miniseries, looked at cocaine smuggling across the Mexican border; it won Soderbergh the Best Director Oscar. Soderbergh went on to direct *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), one of the slickest heist movies of the genre. Other super-smart heist thrillers include the superior *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999), which pitted the audience against some of the most intricate plotting in the history of cinema, a trend initiated by the brain-teasing *The Usual Suspects* (1995).

Something of a step back for the genre, *Chicago* (2002) was a musical drama set in the twenties. Renee Zellweger appeared as Roxie Hart, with Catherine Zeta-Jones as Velma Kelly, a pair of cabaret singers mixed up in a murder case, based on a real incident. This film, with its authentic gangster milieu and production numbers, was inspired by mobster musicals set in the theatre, such as *Broadway* (1929), and sees the crime genre coming full circle.

One of the best and most distinctive recent crime movies is *City of God* (2003 – originally called *Cidade de Deus*), directed by Fernando Meirelles. Set in Rio de Janeiro's worst slum, cynically christened 'City of God', it tells the story of street gang violence and drug turf wars, which ravaged the city in the seventies. The main character is Winston Rodrigues, known as Rocket, a young man who dreams of being a photographer, a career that will allow him to escape the slums. His brother, a hood, is killed early in the film; his other contemporaries 'get religion' or work honestly, but most end up joining street gangs and being swept into crime. The most notorious and bloodthirsty of the gangstas is L'il Ze and his level-headed partner Bene, who sell drugs in town. Their only competition is 'Carrot', who teams up with Knockout Ned, a local hero, to stand up to L'il Ze. With stories entitled 'The Story of the Tender Trio', 'Flirting with Crime' and 'The Story of Knockout Ned', and Rocket's voiceover narration, *City of God* looks back to 'rise and fall' crime biographies, such as *The Public Enemy* and *GoodFellas*, but in an original way, with its intense action, brothel robberies and drug dealing (all beautifully photographed by Casar Charlone). To offset the brutality, Meirelles also depicts the community's flourishing nightlife, with sequences set in a vast nightclub pumping out James Brown tracks and 'Kung Fu Fighting', by Carl Douglas. The opening chicken chase scene is among the most arresting in modern cinema, as a mob of pistol-packing kids, the Runts, chase a hapless hen (making a bid for freedom) hell for leather through back street slums, only to round a corner and confront the police in a stand-off. *City of God* is breathtaking, but uncompromising; be warned: it is unlike any other crime film you will have seen.

Crime movies have used many settings, from the slums of Rio, the terraces of Newcastle and the towering neon palaces of Las Vegas, to the streets of San Francisco, the back streets of Paris and the mean streets of New York. To begin the movie gangster's story, we must look back to the thirsty thirties of Prohibition, when the public enemies first appeared, riding the crest of a crime wave…