



Bad Boys: The Actors of Film Noir

By Karen Burroughs Hannsberry

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The film noir male is an infinitely watchable being, exhibiting a wide range of emotions, behaviors, and motivations. Some of the characters from the film noir era are extremely violent, such as Neville Brand's Chester in *D.O.A.* (1950), whose sole pleasure in life seems to come from inflicting pain on others. Other noirs feature flawed authority figures, such as Kirk Douglas's Jim McLeod in *Detective Story* (1951), controlled by a rigid moral code that costs him his marriage and ultimately his life. Others present ruthless crime bosses, hapless males whose lives are turned upside down because of their ceaseless longing for a woman, and even courageous men on the right side of the law. The private and public lives of over ninety actors who starred in the films noirs of the 1940s and 1950s are presented here. Some of the actors, such as Humphrey Bogart, Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Edward G. Robinson, Robert Mitchum, Raymond Burr, Fred MacMurray, Jack Palance and Mickey Rooney, enjoyed great renown, while others, like Gene Lockhart, Moroni Olsen and Harold Vermilyea, were less familiar, particularly to modern audiences. An appendix focuses on the actors who were least known but frequently seen in minor roles.

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Editorial Review

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Film noir presents gritty stories and guilty viewing pleasure. About 90 male actors of classic film noir titles of the 1940s and 1950s are featured in this volume. The researcher will find the expected (James Cagey, Humphrey Bogart, Robert Mitchum), the less well known (Morris Carnovsky, Douglas Fowley), and actors who transcend the genre (Kirk Douglas, Alan Ladd). The author also wrote *Femme Noir: Bad Girls of Film* (McFarland, 1988). For the new volume, she chose actors who have played significant roles in several film noir releases, and viewed 240 films in order to describe the plots and characters accurately.

Most of the volume treats these "bad boys" in depth, in A to Z entries ranging from five to twelve pages in length. Personal life stories are intermingled with discussions of films. While the emphasis is on noir, some films outside the genre are discussed if they are seminal to the actor (e.g., the Andy Hardy series for Mickey Rooney). A filmography and bibliography conclude each entry. Black-and-white photos help the reader identify individual actors, some of whom, such as Jay Flippen and Gene Lockhart, may well be remembered more for their "mugs" than for their monikers. An additional 25 actors are given one-page treatments in the first appendix. Another appendix gives noteworthy lines, arranged by broad topic such as "Regarding Dames," "Sizing Up the Other Guy," and "Penetrating Put-downs" (e.g., Richard Widmark's line "I wouldn't give you the skin off a grape," from *Kiss of Death*). Following the general bibliography, an index lists titles, names, and awards.

Depth rather than breadth is the key to this enjoyable reference work, which will be welcomed by the film fan as well as the researcher and is recommended for larger film collections. *RBB*

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Review

Super research...fascinating stories...very valuable...a fun selection...the photos are fantastic. --*Classic Images*

Enjoyable...will be welcomed by the film fan as well as the researcher...recommended. --*Booklist/RBB*

Welcome...fills a gap...engaging and meaty discussions of the actors guarantees this work a wide audience...recommended. Public and academic libraries. All levels. --*Choice*

About the Author

Karen Burroughs Hannsberry is also the author of *Femme Noir: Bad Girls of Film* (1998) and writes regularly for *Classic Images* and *Films of the Golden Age*. She lives in Chicago.

Users Review

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Joseph Tucker:

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