



FILM NOIR

● **Film Noir** (literally 'black film or cinema') was coined by French film critics (first by Frank Nino in 1946) who noticed the trend of how 'dark', downbeat and black the looks and themes were of many American crime and detective films released in France following the war, such as ★ [The Maltese Falcon \(1941\)](#), [Murder, My Sweet \(1944\)](#), ★ [Double Indemnity \(1944\)](#), and [Laura \(1944\)](#).

It was a style of black and white American films that first evolved in the 1940s, became prominent in the post-war era, and lasted in a classic "Golden Age" period until about 1960 (marked by the 'last' film of the classic film noir era, Orson Welles' ★ [Touch of Evil \(1958\)](#)).

Important Note: Strictly speaking, film noir is not a genre, but rather the mood, style, point-of-view, or tone of a film. It is also helpful to realize that 'film noir' usually refers to a distinct historical period of film history - the decade of film-making after World War II, similar to the German Expressionism or the French New Wave periods. However, it was labeled as such only *after* the classic period - early noir film-makers didn't even use the film designation (as they would the labels "western" or "musical"), and were not conscious that their films would be labeled noirs.

Titles of many film noirs often reflect the nature or tone of the style and content itself: [Dark Passage \(1947\)](#), [The Naked City \(1948\)](#), [Fear in the Night \(1947\)](#), ★ [Out of the Past \(1947\)](#), [Kiss Me Deadly \(1955\)](#), etc.

Cinematic Origins and Roots of Classic Film Noir:

The themes of noir, derived from sources in Europe, were imported to Hollywood by emigre film-makers. Noirs were rooted in German Expressionism of the 1920s and 1930s, such as in [The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari \(1919\)](#) or Fritz Lang's [M \(1931\)](#). These films, from German directors such as F. W. Murnau, G. W. Pabst, and Robert Wiene, were noted for their stark camera angles and movements, chiaroscuro lighting and shadowy, high-contrast images - all elements of later film noir. In addition, the French sound films of the 30s, such as director Julien Duvivier's [Pepe Le Moko \(1937\)](#), contributed to noir's development.



Another cinematic origin of film noir was from the plots and themes often taken from adaptations of American literary works - usually from best-selling, hard-boiled, pulp novels and crime fiction by Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Dashiell Hammett, or Cornell Woolrich. As a result, the earliest film noirs were detective thrillers. *Film noir* was also derived from the [crime/gangster](#) and [detective/mystery](#) sagas from the 1930s (i.e., [Little Caesar \(1930\)](#), [Public Enemy \(1931\)](#) and [Scarface \(1932\)](#)), but very different in tone and characterization. Notable film noir [gangster](#) films, such as [They Drive By Night \(1940\)](#), [Key Largo \(1948\)](#) and [White Heat \(1949\)](#) each featured noir elements within the traditional gangster framework.

Classic *film noir* developed during and after World War II, taking advantage of the post-war ambience of anxiety, pessimism, and suspicion. These films reflected the resultant tensions and insecurities of the time period, and counter-balanced the optimism of Hollywood's musicals and comedies. Fear, mistrust, bleakness, loss of innocence, despair and paranoia are readily evident in noir, reflecting the 'chilly' Cold War period when the threat of nuclear annihilation was ever-present. The criminal, violent, misogynistic, hard-boiled, or greedy perspectives of anti-heroes in film noir were a metaphoric symptom of society's evils, with a strong undercurrent of moral conflict, purposelessness and sense of injustice. There were rarely happy or optimistic endings in noirs.

Very often, a *film noir* story was developed around a cynical, hard-hearted, disillusioned male character [e.g., Robert Mitchum, Fred MacMurray, or Humphrey Bogart] who encountered a beautiful but promiscuous, amoral, double-dealing and seductive *femme fatale* [e.g., Mary Astor, Veronica Lake, Jane Greer, Barbara Stanwyck, or Lana Turner]. She would use her feminine wiles and come-hither sexuality to manipulate him into becoming the fall guy - often following a murder. After a betrayal or double-cross, she was frequently destroyed as well, often at the cost of the hero's life. As women during the war period were given new-found independence and better job-earning power in the homeland during the war, they

would suffer -- on the screen -- in these films of the 40s.

Derivatives of Film Noir, and Post-Noirs:

Oftentimes, noir could also branch out into other genre-categories, such as *thrillers* (i.e., Samuel Fuller's **Pickup on South Street (1953)**), *horror* films, *westerns* (i.e. **The Gunfighter (1950)**), *science-fiction* (i.e., **Kiss Me Deadly (1955)**) and even *film-noir* tribute-parodies, spoofs or *comedies* (i.e., **Peeper (1975)**, **Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (1982)**). It has been noted that a sub-category of *film gris* (or 'gray film') exists, according to writer Jon Tuska, meaning film noirs that have happy denouements.

So-called *post-noirs* (modern *tech-noirs*, *neo-noirs*, or cyberpunk) appeared after the classic period with an attempt to revive the themes of classic noir, although they portrayed contemporary times and were often filmed in color. *Tech-noir* (also known as 'cyberpunk') refers specifically to a hybrid of high-tech *science-fiction* and film noirs portraying a decayed, grungy, unpromising, dark and dystopic future - similar to what was found in the low-life, underworld environments of hard-boiled 'pulp fiction' made popular by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

(Well-recognized *post-, neo- or tech-noirs* include a wide variety such as: Don Siegel's crime thriller **Dirty Harry (1971)**, Roman Polanski's ★ **Chinatown (1974)**, Lawrence Kasdan's **Body Heat (1981)**, Ridley Scott's gritty sci-fi ★ **Blade Runner (1982)**, Adrian Lyne's **Fatal Attraction (1987)**, Kenneth Branagh's **Dead Again (1991)**, Paul Verhoeven's **Basic Instinct (1992)**, John Dahl's **The Last Seduction (1994)**, Bryan Singer's **The Usual Suspects (1995)**, the Wachowski's **Bound (1996)**, Curtis Hanson's **L.A. Confidential (1997)**, and Alex Proyas' **Dark City (1998)**.) See discussion later in this document.

Primary Characteristics and Conventions of Film Noir: Themes and Styles

The primary moods of classic *film noir* were melancholy, alienation, bleakness, disillusionment, disenchantment, pessimism, ambiguity, moral corruption, evil, guilt, desperation and paranoia.

Heroes (or anti-heroes), corrupt characters and villains included down-and-out, conflicted hard-boiled detectives or private eyes, cops, gangsters, government agents, a lone wolf, socio-paths or killers, crooks, war veterans, politicians, petty criminals, murderers, or just plain Joes. These protagonists were often morally-ambiguous low-lives from the dark and gloomy underworld of violent crime and corruption. Distinctively, they were cynical, tarnished, obsessive (sexual or otherwise), brooding, menacing, sinister, sardonic, disillusioned, frightened and insecure loners (usually men), struggling to survive - and in the end, ultimately losing.

Storylines were often elliptical, non-linear and twisting. Narratives were frequently complex, maze-like and convoluted, and typically told with foreboding background music, flashbacks (or a series of flashbacks), witty, razor-sharp and acerbic dialogue, and/or reflective and confessional, first-person voice-over narration. Amnesia suffered by the protagonist was a common plot device, as was the downfall of an innocent Everyman who fell victim to temptation or was framed. Revelations regarding the hero were made to explain/justify the hero's own cynical perspective on life.

The females in film noir were either of two types (or archetypes) - dutiful, reliable, trustworthy and loving women; or *femme fatales* - mysterious, duplicitous, double-crossing, gorgeous, unloving, predatory, tough-sweet, unreliable, irresponsible, manipulative and desperate women. Usually, the male protagonist in film noir wished to elude his mysterious past, and had to choose what path to take (or have the fateful choice made for him).



Invariably, the choice would be an overly ambitious one, to follow the dangerous but desirable wishes of these dames. It would be to follow the goadings of a traitorous, self-destructive *femme fatale* who would lead the struggling, disillusioned, and doomed hero into committing murder or some other crime of passion coupled with twisted love. When the major character was a detective or private eye, he would become embroiled and trapped in an increasingly-complex, convoluted case that would lead to fatalistic, suffocating evidences of corruption, irresistible love and death. The *femme fatale*, who had also transgressed societal norms with her independent and smart, menacing actions, would bring both of them to a downfall.

Film noir films (mostly shot in gloomy grays, blacks and whites) thematically showed the dark and inhumane side of human nature with cynicism and doomed love, and they emphasized the brutal, unhealthy, seamy, shadowy, dark and sadistic sides of the human experience. An oppressive atmosphere of menace, pessimism, anxiety, suspicion that anything can go wrong, dingy realism, futility, fatalism, defeat and entrapment were stylized characteristics of *film noir*. The protagonists in film noir were normally driven by their past or by human weakness to repeat former mistakes.

Film noir films were marked visually by expressionistic lighting, deep-focus or depth of field camera work, disorienting visual schemes, jarring editing or juxtaposition of elements, ominous shadows, skewed camera angles (usually vertical or diagonal rather than horizontal), circling cigarette smoke, existential sensibilities, and unbalanced or moody compositions. Settings were often interiors with low-key (or single-source) lighting, venetian-blinded windows and rooms, and dark, claustrophobic, gloomy appearances. Exteriors were often urban night scenes with deep shadows, wet asphalt, dark alleyways, rain-slicked or mean streets, flashing neon lights, and low key lighting. Story locations were often in murky and dark streets, dimly-lit and low-rent apartments and hotel rooms of big cities, or abandoned warehouses. [Often-times, war-time scarcities were the reason for the reduced budgets and shadowy, stark sets of B-pictures and film noirs.]

Some of the most prominent directors of film noir included Orson Welles, John Huston, Billy Wilder, Edgar Ulmer, Douglas Sirk, Robert Siodmak, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, and Howard Hawks.

The Earliest Film Noirs: In the 1940s

Many sources have claimed that director Boris Ingster's **Stranger on the Third Floor (1940)** was the *first* full-featured film noir. It starred Peter Lorre as the sinister 'stranger' (cast due to his creepy performance in **M (1931)**), in a story about the nightmarish after-effects of circumstantial testimony. Others claim Orson Welles' masterpiece ★ [Citizen Kane \(1941\)](#) was also an early and influential pre-film noir.

The first detective film to use the shadowy, nihilistic noir style in a definitive way was the pivotal work of novice director John Huston in the mystery classic ★ [The Maltese Falcon \(1941\)](#), from a 1929 book by Dashiell Hammett. [Actually, Huston's film was not the first version - it had been directed earlier by Roy Del Ruth in 1931, starring Ricardo Cortez in the lead role.] It was famous for Humphrey Bogart's cool, laconic private eye hero Sam Spade in pursuit of crooks greedy for a jewel-encrusted statue, and Bogart's foil - Mary Astor as the deceptive *femme fatale*.



Noir Duo: Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake

The acting duo of Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake was first teamed in the superb early noir thriller **This Gun For Hire (1942)** (with the tagline: "He's dynamite with a gun or a girl"). From the novel *A Gun For Sale* by renowned British novelist Graham Greene, the moody noir featured Ladd in a star-making role (his first lead role) as a ruthless, cat-loving, vengeful San Francisco professional hit-man named Raven working for a peppermint-candy loving fat man Willard Gates (Laird Cregar) and his wheelchair-bound Nitro Chemicals executive Alvin Brewster (Tully Marshall) - both double-crossers who are selling secrets to foreign agents (the Japanese), while paired with popular wartime pinup star Lake as nightclub showgirl Ellen Graham, his hostage.



Another Dashiell Hammett book of political corruption and murder was adapted for Stuart Heisler's **The Glass Key (1942)** for Paramount Studios - again with the duo of Ladd and Lake, and noted as one of the best Hammett adaptations. Ladd starred as Ed Beaumont, a right-hand man and political aide attempting to save his employer (Brian Donlevy) from a murder frame-up, while Lake played the seductive fiancée of the boss. The film was noted for the vicious beating given to Ladd by a crime lord thug

(William Bendix).

The popular noir couple were brought together again in George Marshall's post-war crime thriller **The Blue Dahlia (1946)**, with an Oscar-nominated screenplay by Raymond Chandler (the only work he ever wrote directly for the screen). Alan Ladd portrayed returning war veteran Johnny Morrison who discovered that his wife Helen (Doris Dowling) was unfaithful during his absence. When she turned up dead and he became the prime suspect, he was aided in the case by the mysterious Joyce Haywood (Lake) - the seductive ex-wife of his wife's lover.

Orson Welles and Film Noir:

Orson Welles' films have significant noir features, such as in his expressionistic ★ **Citizen Kane (1941)**, and the complex **The Lady from Shanghai (1948)** - with its plot (from Sherwood King's novel *If I Should Die Before I Wake*)

about a destructive love triangle between Irish seaman Michael O'Hara (Welles himself), a manipulative Rita Hayworth as the platinum blonde-haired *femme fatale* Elsa (or Rosalie), and her husband Arthur Bannister (Everett Sloane). Its final sequence in a San Francisco "hall of mirrors" fun-house was symbolic and reflective of the shattered relationships between the characters, exemplified by a wounded O'Hara's last words: "Maybe I'll live so long that I'll forget her. Maybe I'll die trying."

Welles' Mexican border-town B-movie classic ★ **Touch of Evil (1958)** starred Charlton Heston as Vargas - a naive Mexican-American narcotics cop, Janet Leigh as his imperiled, honeymooning wife Susan, and Welles' own corrupt and corpulent local cop Hank Quinlan. The film also featured a comeback appearance by cigar-smoking bordello madam Marlene Dietrich, and a breathtaking opening credits sequence filmed in a single-take. [This film is generally considered the *last* film in the classic cycle of film noirs.] Later, Welles' expressionistic noir and psychological drama **The Trial (1962)** was an adaptation of Franz Kafka's classic novel, with Anthony Perkins as Joseph K - a man condemned for an unnamed crime in an unknown country.

More Definitive 40s Noirs:



Early classic non-detective film noirs included Fritz Lang's steamy and fatalistic **Scarlet Street (1945)** - one of the moodiest, blackest thrillers ever made, about a mild-mannered painter's (Edward G. Robinson) unpunished and unsuspected murder of an amoral *femme fatale* (Joan Bennett) after she had led him to commit embezzlement, impersonated him in order to sell his paintings, and had been deceitful and cruel to him - causing him in a fit of anger to murder her with an ice-pick. Director Abraham Polonsky's expressionistic, politically-subversive **Force of Evil (1948)** starred John Garfield as a corrupt mob attorney.

British director Carol Reed's tense tale of treachery set in post-war Vienna, ★ **The Third Man (1949)**, with the memorable character of black market racketeer Harry Lime (Orson Welles), ended with a climactic shootout in the city's noirish underground sewer. And the nightmarishly-dark, rapid-paced and definitive **D.O.A. (1949)** from cinematographer-director Rudolph Mate - told the flashback story of lethally-poisoned and doomed protagonist Frank Bigelow (Edmond O'Brien), a victim of circumstance who announced in the opening: "I want to report a murder - mine." [It was remade as **D.O.A. (1988)** with Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan.]

Noirs with Raymond Chandler's 'Philip Marlowe':

Raymond Chandler's gumshoe Philip Marlowe was often portrayed by different actors:

- director Irving Reis' **The Falcon Takes Over (1942)** was based on Chandler's book, *Farewell, My Lovely*, and was the third installment in the *Falcon* series of films; it was based on novelist Michael Arlen's 1940 fictional crime short story *Gay Falcon*, with the gentleman sleuth protagonist (portrayed by actor George Sanders) named Gay Stanhope Falcon (later renamed Gay Lawrence) rather than Philip Marlowe
- singer Dick Powell starred as the down-and-out PI in Edward Dmytryk's twisting story of intrigue **Murder, My Sweet (1944)** (aka **Farewell, My Lovely**, Chandler's book title)



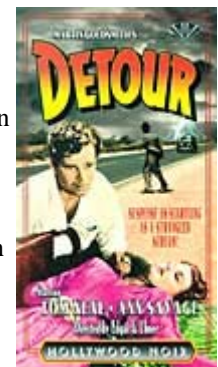
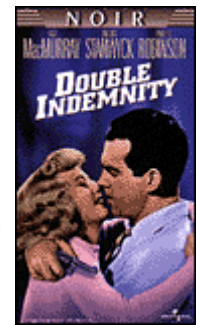
searching for ex-con Moose Malloy's (Mike Mazurki) missing lover Velma/Helen Grayle (Claire Trevor) in wartime Los Angeles

- Humphrey Bogart, teamed with real-life wife Lauren Bacall, played the role of private detective Philip Marlowe in the confusing, classic Howard Hawks who-dun-it ★ [The Big Sleep \(1946\)](#) involving blackmail, pornography, and murder in Los Angeles - it was based on Chandler's 1939 novel and adapted for the screen by co-writers William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett and Jules Furthman
- director/star Robert Montgomery was Philip Marlowe in **Lady in the Lake (1946)** - experimentally filmed from the protagonist's first-person point of view
- Elliott Gould portrayed the detective in Robert Altman's spoof **The Long Goodbye (1973)** (based upon Chandler's 1953 novel) set in modern-day Los Angeles, in which the lone, unconventional sleuth investigated the murder of a friend's wife
- Robert Mitchum was in the role in director Dick Richards' **Farewell, My Lovely (1975)** - a remake of **Murder, My Sweet (1944)** and **The Falcon Takes Over (1942)**; the film was set in Los Angeles with Charlotte Rampling as the seductive Helen Grayle/Velma and Jack O'Halloran as Moose Malloy
- Robert Mitchum again starred as Marlowe in **The Big Sleep (1978)** - a remake of Howard Hawks' 1946 film, with Candy Clark and Sarah Miles as the two Sternwood daughters, and Oliver Reed as corrupt gangster Eddie Mars

Romance Film Noirs with Great *Femme Fatales*:

Twisted, shocking melodramatic film noirs featuring deadly *femme fatales* on a path of romance and self-destruction (romance noirs) with the men in their lives included the following examples:

- Fritz Lang's second American film **You Only Live Once (1937)** with a framed-for-murder, doomed ex-convict Henry Fonda in flight to the border with loser wife Sylvia Sidney and child
- William Wyler's [The Letter \(1940\)](#) featured Bette Davis as a murdering wife whose professed innocence was compromised by a damning letter
- Billy Wilder's (and Raymond Chandler's) adaptation of James M. Cain's novel ★ [Double Indemnity \(1944\)](#) included a persuasive, sinister brassy blonde (Barbara Stanwyck) who convinced a smart-talking insurance agent/lover (Fred MacMurray) to murder her unsuspecting husband so they could share 'double indemnity' insurance proceeds; also with Edward G. Robinson as a shrewd insurance investigator
- Fritz Lang's tense **The Woman in the Window (1944)** told about a law-abiding college professor (Edward G. Robinson) who became embroiled in a crime when he unintentionally committed a murder and suddenly found himself on the run from blackmail with a beautiful, strange model (Joan Bennett)
- Michael Curtiz' melodramatic, mother-daughter noir classic [Mildred Pierce \(1945\)](#) featured Best Actress-winning Joan Crawford as a suspected murderess who covered up for her beloved but venomous *femme fatale* daughter (Ann Blyth)
- the psychological, melodramatic noir **Leave Her to Heaven (1945)** highlighted a menacing, father-fixated, unstable femme fatale (Gene Tierney) who would stop at nothing (the drowning murder of her husband's younger brother in a lake, and a deliberate miscarriage to kill her unborn child when she deliberately fell down stairs) to possessively hold onto the man she loved
- Edgar G. Ulmer's gritty, cheaply-made ("Poverty Row"), fatalistic, cultish crime film **Detour (1945)** was about the bleak twists of fate; in a flashback story cynically narrated, a world-weary, identity-stealing hitchhiker (Tom Neal) was haplessly involved in an ambiguous death during his thumbing trek to Los Angeles, and later became involved with a nasty hitchhiker - the film's blackmailing, vindictive *femme fatale* con Vera (Ann Savage) whom he accidentally strangles with a telephone cord through a closed door; [the film was remade as **Detour (1992)** and starred the son of the original ill-fated protagonist, Tom Neal, Jr.]
- Tay Garnett's stylish and moody [The Postman Always Rings Twice \(1946\)](#), from James M. Cain's novel, starred "sweater girl" Lana Turner as the libidinous, restless platinum blonde wife Cora Smith - who was stuck in a roadside diner and convinced her illicit lover Frank Chambers (John Garfield) to murder her good-hearted husband Nick (Cecil Kellaway)
- in Lewis Milestone's **The Strange Love of Martha Ivers (1946)**, Barbara Stanwyck's murderous past might be revealed by her alcoholic, unrespected husband Kirk Douglas
- Rita Hayworth was featured in a sultry performance as the black glove-stripping [Gilda \(1946\)](#) to the tune of "Put the Blame on Mame" in Charles Vidor's classic film noir of a love triangle - the 'love goddess' portrayed the sexy, hedonistic red-headed wife of South American casino owner Ballin Mundson (George Macready) who became



involved with her husband's abusive croupier (Glenn Ford) - her ex-beau; she became notorious for her much-quoted line: "If I'd been a ranch, they would have named me the Bar Nothing"

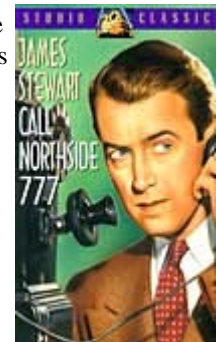
- Robert Siodmak's adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's 1927 short story of a twisting double-cross, [The Killers \(1946\)](#), featured Burt Lancaster (in his film debut as the doomed ex-boxer Ole "the Swede" Andersen) and the stunning Ava Gardner as the manipulative vixen Kitty Collins (who was quoted as saying: "I'm poison, Swede, to myself and everybody around me"); it was noted for its exceptional beginning in which the Swede was assassinated by two professional killers - and accepted his death stoically; [this film was remade by director Don Siegel as the violent crime noir thriller [The Killers \(1964\)](#) with Lee Marvin, Ronald Reagan (in his last feature role), and Angie Dickinson]
- in director John Cromwell's [Dead Reckoning \(1947\)](#), an on-the-run WWII veteran's alluring Southern girlfriend (Lizabeth Scott) threatened military buddy Humphrey Bogart
- director Jacques Tourneur's quintessential, slick film noir ★ [Out of the Past \(1947\)](#) (aka [Build My Gallows High](#)) of underworld intrigue was filled with complex flashbacks; it featured Robert Mitchum as the doomed, double-crossed ex-private eye Jeff Markham with a sordid past who fell for the icy *femme fatale* Kathie Moffat (Jane Greer) he was trailing for ruthless gangster Whit Sterling (Kirk Douglas); Markham knew the dangers of falling in love with her ("You're like a leaf that the wind blows from one gutter to another"); [remade as [Against All Odds \(1984\)](#) with an older Jane Greer as her original character's mother]
- Nicholas Ray's doomed lover film [They Live By Night \(1949\)](#) starred Farley Granger and Cathy O'Donnell as fugitive, misfit criminals on the run [remade as [Thieves Like Us \(1974\)](#)]
- Joseph H. Lewis' tabloid romantic/crime B-movie melodrama [Gun Crazy \(1949\)](#) - was another *amour fou* 'Bonnie and Clyde' tale with two disturbed and doomed protagonists/lovers on a crime spree - gun-loving Bart (John Dall) and blonde carnival sharpshooter (Peggy Cummins); noted for one unbroken take filmed in the getaway car during a bank robbery scene
- Otto Preminger's [Angel Face \(1953\)](#) starred Jean Simmons as a psychotic 'angel of death' who talked chauffeur Robert Mitchum into a murder scheme
- Henry Hathaway's Techni-colored noir [Niagara \(1953\)](#) provided the perfect star vehicle for curvy sexpot Marilyn Monroe as Rose Loomis, a sinfully-wayward, unhappily married woman (to Joseph Cotten); one of its taglines proclaimed: "A raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control!"



Documentary-Style Noirs:

There are numerous, pseudo documentary-style film noirs, often set in dark, rain-swept, crime-ridden urban areas, that were made in a realistic, semi-documentary fashion:

- Henry Hathaway's [The House on 92nd Street \(1945\)](#) about Nazi spies scheming to learn the atom bomb formula
- [Call Northside 777 \(1948\)](#) with James Stewart as a Chicago reporter who uncovered a police coverup that sent a wrongly-convicted, innocent slum boy to jail for killing a cop eleven years earlier
- director Jules Dassin's great crime drama [The Naked City \(1948\)](#) with Barry Fitzgerald as a New York City cop investigating a murder over six days, and climaxing with a suspenseful chase and shootout on the Williamsburg Bridge
- Crane Wilbur's crime drama [Canon City \(1948\)](#) - a re-enactment of a 1947 prison escape in Colorado
- the little-seen [Abandoned \(1949\)](#), from director Joseph Newman, about a late 1940s LA newspaper reporter (Dennis O'Keefe) pursuing a missing girl, along with her sister (Gale Storm known for the TV series *My Little Margie*), into the sordid black-market baby adoption racket, while encountering a corrupt private investigator (Raymond Burr)
- also, Joseph Newman's moralistic urban crime drama [711 Ocean Drive \(1950\)](#), about the rise and fall of an organized crime kingpin (Edmond O'Brien as a telephone company repairman turned bad); the film capitalized on various book-making scandals at the time sensationalized and exposed in the newspapers; with on-location settings of L.A., Palm Springs and Nevada, particularly at Hoover Dam
- Billy Wilder's [The Big Carnival \(1951\)](#) (aka [Ace in the Hole](#)), an insightful expose of the media, starred Kirk Douglas as a cynical and immoral newsman named Charles Tatum who exploited a 'human interest' story to the public by orchestrating a media frenzy around a man trapped in a Pueblo cliff dwelling tunnel collapse
- Alfred Hitchcock's true-life story [The Wrong Man \(1956\)](#) with Henry Fonda as a musician framed and wrongly-accused of committing armed robbery - and undergoing a nightmarish ordeal



Prison Noirs:

Noirs have sometimes been set in prisons or jails:

- in Mervyn LeRoy's [I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang \(1932\)](#), an innocent WWI veteran (Paul Muni) was wrongly imprisoned as a chain gang convict, and after two escapes faced life as a hunted fugitive; also the earlier RKO release by Rowland Brown, [Hell's Highway \(1932\)](#) - with a similar bleak view of a Southern chain-gang prison
- Fritz Lang's message film [Fury \(1936\)](#) - his first American film - with Spencer Tracy as a falsely accused kidnapper who was threatened and nearly-lynched by a mob in a small Midwestern town
- Jules Dassin's [Brute Force \(1947\)](#) - more harsh than noirish about the oppressive Westgate prison with Burt Lancaster as an inmate seeking to escape to be with his critically-ill girlfriend

Menaced-Women Noirs:

In menaced-women noirs, the tables are turned and women are menaced by the men in their lives (often their husbands), as in these examples:

- in George Cukor's [Gaslight \(1944\)](#), Ingrid Bergman was driven to near insanity by her menacing, mentally-cruel husband Charles Boyer
- in Otto Preminger's hard-edged noir romance [Laura \(1944\)](#), a police detective (Dana Andrews) investigated socialite Laura's (Gene Tierney) murder until she reappeared - and was threatened a second time; the film contained troubling necrophiliac themes and sexual obsession by the hard-boiled detective for the dead woman; with a great supporting cast including Vincent Price, Clifton Webb, and Judith Anderson; Oscar winner for Best B/W Cinematography
- in Anatole Litvak's unnerving and tense [Sorry, Wrong Number \(1948\)](#), bed-ridden hypochondriac/heiress Barbara Stanwyck overheard a phone call plot that her weak husband Burt Lancaster planned to kill her
- in Nicholas Ray's [In A Lonely Place \(1950\)](#), Humphrey Bogart portrayed a burned-out, troubled, hot-tempered, and near-psychotic Hollywood screenwriter and murder suspect while having an affair with neighboring, alibi-providing, aspiring blonde starlet Laurel Grey (Gloria Grahame) - their sexual attractiveness to each other was soon torn apart by jealousy, fear, and suspicion



Hitchcock's Menaced Women:

Many of Hitchcock's earlier black-and-white works featured menaced women:

- ★ [Rebecca \(1940\)](#) - a naive, unnamed newlywed (Joan Fontaine) was victimized by the housekeeper (Judith Anderson) of her widower husband's ex-wife
- [Suspicion \(1941\)](#) - a wealthy wife (Joan Fontaine again) was suspicious of her fortune-hunting husband (Cary Grant) after the murder of a friend (Nigel Bruce)
- [Shadow of a Doubt \(1943\)](#) - Joseph Cotten starred as a rich widow-killer who threatened his suspicious favorite niece (Teresa Wright)
- [Spellbound \(1945\)](#) - Gregory Peck appeared as a disturbed, amnesia imposter who was accused of murder and counseled by psychiatrist Ingrid Bergman
- ★ [Notorious \(1946\)](#) - Ingrid Bergman became the slowly-poisoned wife of a Nazi spy (Claude Rains)

Imperiled Children Noirs:

- in Ted Tetzlaff's [The Window \(1949\)](#), a prone-to-lying slum boy (Bobby Driscoll) wasn't believed when he vowed that he had witnessed a New York murder in an adjoining apartment - and his life was threatened by the killers
- in the masterwork ★ [The Night of the Hunter \(1955\)](#), the only film ever directed by actor Charles Laughton, Robert Mitchum starred as a psycho-crazed, creepy preacher (with fingers tattooed reading LOVE and HATE) desperately stalking two children to learn their monetary secret



Corruption and Crime Noirs:

Crime and corruption were the main focus of noir films, often with tough police detectives in pursuit:

- in Charles Brabin's gritty pre-noir **The Beast of the City (1932)**, gangsters were pursued by a serious police chief (Walter Huston)
- in director Archie Mayo's **The Petrified Forest (1936)**, Humphrey Bogart (in an early role) took Bette Davis and Leslie Howard hostage in a desert restaurant/service station
- in Raoul Walsh's **High Sierra (1941)**, Bogart starred as an aging gangster who couldn't give up his life of crime
- in **The Glass Key (1942)**, Alan Ladd saved a politician (Brian Donlevy) from a murder rap
- in Fritz Lang's suspenseful wartime espionage thriller **Ministry of Fear (1944)**, based on Graham Greene's novel, Stephen Neale (Ray Milland), in possession of microfilm, found himself on the run from both the Nazis and the authorities
- in Robert Siodmak's (and cinematographer Woody Bredell's) expressionistic noir thriller **Phantom Lady (1946)**, based upon Cornell Woolrich's (pseudonym William Irish) pulp novel, an engineer (Alan Curtis) accused of murdering his wife (and sentenced to the electric chair) has an unbelievable alibi (involving a mysterious 'lady' with an ornate hat), so a police inspector must race against time to prove his innocence
- in Irving Reis' **Crack-Up (1946)**, a middle-aged art critic and forgery expert (Pat O'Brien) who blacks out must retrace his recent past to circumvent an art forgery conspiracy at a New York museum
- in director Joseph H. Lewis' cult film noir **So Dark the Night (1946)**, a French investigating cop must solve murders committed while on vacation
- director Roy William Neill's (known for a series of 1940s 'Sherlock Holmes' films) murder mystery **Black Angel (1946)**, based on the novel by Cornell Woolrich, was about an alcoholic piano player (Dan Duryea cast against type) who attempted to solve the murder of his estranged wife in Los Angeles when suspected of being the culprit; with a supporting cast of Broderick Crawford and Peter Lorre
- director Robert Wise's nasty noir **Born to Kill (1947)**, based on James Gunn's novel *Deadlier Than the Male*, starred Lawrence Tierney as a mean, cold-blooded double-murderer ("the coldest killer a woman ever loved"), and Claire Trevor as his bad-girl mistress
- in Henry Hathaway's violent crime noir **Kiss of Death (1947)**, Victor Mature starred as paroled robber Nick Bianco opposite chilling, sadistic gangster Tommy Udo (Richard Widmark in his stunning screen debut, noted for the scene in which he giggles hysterically while pushing a wheelchair-bound old woman down a flight of stairs); [remade as the western **The Fiend Who Walked the West (1958)**, and **Kiss of Death (1995)** with Nicolas Cage]
- Robert Siodmak's fatalistic **Cry of the City (1948)** and the doom-laden **Criss Cross (1948)** both featured unreliable characters, tenuous relationships and twisting plots, with Yvonne DeCarlo in the latter film as a *femme fatale* enticing a love-sick Burt Lancaster during a heist gone wrong; [the film was remade by Steven Soderbergh as **The Underneath (1995)**]
- director John Farrow's suspenseful thriller **The Big Clock (1948)**, with a giant corporate clock as the film's centerpiece, told the flashback story of a media executive and crime journalist (Ray Milland) in a race against time to solve the murder of his boss' (Charles Laughton) mistress (Rita Johnson) in 1940s New York; [the film was remade as **No Way Out (1987)** with Kevin Costner and Gene Hackman]
- in director Robert Rossen's Best Picture-winning **All the King's Men (1949)**, Broderick Crawford portrayed a power-corrupted politician based upon Louisiana's Huey Long
- director Robert Wise's last film for RKO, **The Set-Up (1949)** told of an aging boxer (Robert Ryan) betrayed by his trainers
- in black-listed director Jules Dassin's grim **Night and the City (1950)**, Richard Widmark provided the lead performance as an ambitious, scheming, and self-deceiving London hustler
- in John Huston's **The Asphalt Jungle (1950)**, a group of criminals (including Sterling Hayden as Dix Handley) gathered to execute one last, ill-fated jewel heist caper for criminal mastermind Doc (Sam Jaffe) and crooked financial backer (Louis Calhern appearing with his mistress Marilyn Monroe); the unsuccessful jewel robbery unraveled - with the film's final great scene of Dix' death in a Kentucky horse pasture; [remade three times as the western **The Badlanders (1958)** with Alan Ladd, a jewel heist flick titled **Cairo (1963)**, and **Cool Breeze (1972)** with an all-black cast]
- in Nicholas Ray's **On Dangerous Ground (1951)**, embittered cop Robert Ryan - investigating a murder of a young girl outside the city - fell for the blind sister (Ida Lupino) of the prime murder suspect, her mentally-ill brother
- in Fritz Lang's savage **The Big Heat (1953)**, bereaving, unrestrained cop Glenn Ford was on a one-man crusade



against corruption, led by a

- in writer/director Samuel Fuller's action-packed, raw thriller-noir **Pickup on South Street (1953)**, Richard Widmark starred as tough-minded ex-con pickpocket Skip McCoy embroiled in the plot with *femme fatale* prostitute Candy (Jean Peters) after unknowingly stealing microfilm (bound for Communist spies) from her purse during a crowded subway ride
- in Andre de Toth's B-film crime noir **Crime Wave (1954)**, Sterling Hayden starred as a confrontational, hard-nosed detective who despised a paroled San Quentin convict struggling to redeem himself
- Robert Aldrich's apocalyptic, jarring and violent **Kiss Me Deadly (1955)** was an adaptation of Mickey Spillane's novel of the same name; it told the quest tale of hardened and violent detective Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeke) and sexy assistant Velda (Maxine Cooper) to learn about the deadly contents of the "Great Whatsit" box; [later films repeated the motif of the mysterious box, such as **Repo Man (1984)** and **Pulp Fiction (1994)**]
- in Stanley Kubrick's **The Killing (1956)**, Sterling Hayden starred as a criminal involved in a doomed-to-fail horse racetrack robbery, and Marie Windsor portrayed the *femme fatale*
- Alfred Hitchcock's noirish thriller **The Wrong Man (1956)**, based on a true story, found Henry Fonda wrongly accused of a crime that he didn't commit
- in Alexander MacKendrick's **Sweet Smell of Success (1957)** from a script by Clifford Odets and Ernest Lehman, Burt Lancaster starred as a ruthless, all-powerful and evil NYC gossip columnist (based on Walter Winchell) in league with his sleazy press agent (Tony Curtis) - both engaged in a nasty smear campaign to prevent the columnist's sister's marriage to a musician
- in one of the last true classic film noirs, Abraham Polonsky's crime drama **Odds Against Tomorrow (1959)**, a trio of bank-robbers (including Harry Belafonte) faced tensions (of racism and prejudice) within their gang
- in J. Lee Thompson's **Cape Fear (1962)**, Robert Mitchum - in a memorable villainous role - starred as a sadistic, sordid ex-con named Max Cady exacting revenge on the family-man lawyer (Gregory Peck) that sent him to prison; [remade by Martin Scorsese as **Cape Fear (1991)** with Robert DeNiro]



Cross-Over Noirs:

The term *film noir* has also been more widely applied to other categories of films. Some of the most interesting film noir derivatives were the film noir *westerns* of the 1950s:

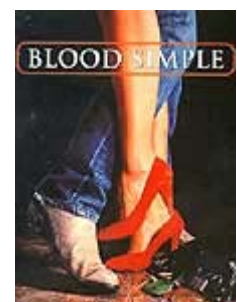
- **Pursued (1947)**
- **The Gunfighter (1950)**
- ★ **High Noon (1952)**
- **The Halliday Brand (1957)**

Non-genre dramatic films, such as **The Lost Weekend (1945)**, ★ **Sunset Boulevard (1950)**, and Laurence Olivier's **Hamlet (1948)** could also be considered cross-over dramatic noirs. There are at least two women's film noirs: **Mildred Pierce (1945)** and Robert Siodmak's **The File on Thelma Jordan (1950)** with Barbara Stanwyck, and surprisingly a *noir* musical, Michael Curtiz' **Young Man with a Horn (1950)**.

Modern Film Noirs: Neo-Noirs (or Post-Noirs)

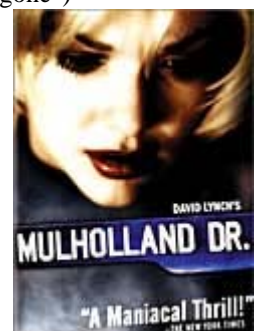
Film noirs have recently been released in the modern era and have been refashioned for present-day sensibilities. A number of them in the 70s were hard-boiled policeman-hero films that contained film noirish characteristics. Most neo-noirs attempted to re-establish the moods and themes of classic noirs. Some examples follow:

- director Sam Fuller's unorthodox, bold and raw, feminist B-film **The Naked Kiss (1964)**, a treatise about the abuse and exploitation of women by perverse men, told about a reformed call-girl (Constance Towers) who learned of the hypocrisy of her fiancée - the most respected citizen of the community
- maverick Robert Altman's **The Long Goodbye (1973)**, was a revisionistic update of Raymond Chandler's novel, with Elliott Gould as worn-out private eye Philip Marlowe in 1970s Los Angeles
- Roman Polanski's noirish detective thriller ★ **Chinatown (1974)** starred Jack Nicholson as J.J. Gittes - an ex-LA cop turned Bogart-style PI, who became embroiled in a true-to-life



land and water scandal and conspiracy, crimes including incest and murder, with a bleak and despairing climax on the streets of Chinatown; followed by the sequel **The Two Jakes (1990)**

- Arthur Penn's noirish mystery-thriller **Night Moves (1975)** featured Gene Hackman as a doomed LA private eye searching in the Florida Keys for a runaway teenaged step-daughter (a young Melanie Griffith) - and encountering lethal circumstances
- Peter Hyam's little-seen and forgotten **Peeper (1975) (aka Fat Chance)**, a semi-serious spoof of the 40s detective films, starred Michael Caine as Leslie C. Tucker - a trench-coated detective in LA commissioned to find a wealthy man's long-lost missing daughter (either Natalie Wood or Kitty Winn); the tagline stated: "Back in '47, a gun was a roscoe, a private-eye was a Peeper, and murder was okay as long as nobody got hurt. In fact, anything was okay with this Peeper on the case because he wouldn't know who-done-it even if he done it himself"
- the twisted, sexy noirish **Body Heat (1981)** bore a marked resemblance to ★ **Double Indemnity (1944)** - it was the directorial debut film of Lawrence Kasdan about a lawyer (William Hurt) enticed to murder a sultry *femme fatale's* (Kathleen Turner) husband (Richard Crenna)
- the feverish, low-budget debut film of the Coen Brothers', **Blood Simple (1984)** told about a murder plot gone awry; with M. Emmett Walsh as an amoral PI hired to kill a honky-tonk bar owner's (Dan Hedaya) unfaithful wife (Frances McDormand) and her bartender lover (John Getz)
- David Lynch's disturbing and brilliant **Blue Velvet (1986)** told about the seedy and corrupt under-side of suburban Americana through the voyeuristic findings of a college student (Kyle MacLachlan) and his girlfriend (Laura Dern) regarding sexual blackmail, drugs, immorality, a sado-masochistic singer (Isabella Rosselini) and a psychotic underworld sadist (Dennis Hopper)
- Alan Parker's stylistic post-noir **Angel Heart (1987)**, based on William Hjortsberg's novel *Fallen Angel* - was a religious-themed film noir/supernatural horror mixture set in the world of New Orleans voodoo, starring Mickey Rourke as a seedy, Mickey Spillane-type of 1950's Brooklyn private eye who was hired by a Satanic client Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro); it was more remembered for its notorious sex scene between Rourke and Lisa Bonet (in her film debut) than the plot
- Bob Rafelson's **Black Widow (1987)** featured a murderous and charming gold-digger *femme fatale* Theresa Russell who was pursued by federal sleuth Alexandra (Debra Winger)
- Stephen Frears' **The Grifters (1990)** featured three lowlife con artists (John Cusack, his estranged mother Anjelica Huston, and his girlfriend Annette Bening)
- another Coen Brothers masterpiece, **Miller's Crossing (1990)**, was a rehash of Dashiell Hammett's novel *Red Harvest* and with many similarities to *The Glass Key*, with Albert Finney as an Irish crime boss in the Prohibition era, and Gabriel Byrne as his trusted lieutenant
- David Mamet's-penned **Glengarry Glen Ross (1992)**, was a dark modern film noir about corrupt real-estate salesmen
- Howard Franklin's **The Public Eye (1992)**, was set in a 40s NYC - a modern *film noir* character study and crime thriller told from the perspective of Joe Pesci's character - Leon "The Great Bernzini" Bernstein
- John Dahl's **Red Rock West (1993)** starred Nicolas Cage caught in a twisting plot; Dahl's dark, erotic follow-up feminist noir thriller **The Last Seduction (1993)** starred Linda Fiorentino as an amoral, evil *femme fatale*
- the contemporary, twisting neo-noir **China Moon (1994)** starred Ed Harris as a straight Florida cop, *femme fatale* Madeleine Stowe as his unhappily-married, irresistible love interest, and Benicio del Toro as a rookie cop
- Steven Soderbergh's **The Underneath (1995)**, was a loose derivative of the film noir thriller **Criss Cross (1949)**, starring Peter Gallagher
- Bryan Singer's convoluted thriller **The Usual Suspects (1995)**, was a cleverly-written tale (with an Oscar-winning screenplay) with a Best Supporting Actor Oscar-winning performance by Kevin Spacey as a club-footed con man Roger "Verbal" Kint - and the unseen mobster Keyser Soze ("And like that, he's gone")
- Curtis Hanson's recreated early-50s Hollywood, Techni-colored, retro-noir crime drama of scandalous sex and corruption, **L.A. Confidential (1997)**, had an Oscar-winning screenplay, and featured three antagonistic police detectives (Guy Pearce, Russell Crowe, and Kevin Spacey) in a corrupt LAPD investigating a mass slaying at a diner; Kim Basinger had a Best Supporting Actress Oscar-winning role as a Veronica-Lake look-alike *femme fatale*/prostitute; this was a screen adaptation from several of James Ellroy's crime novels
- writer/director Christopher Nolan's **Memento (2000)** was a confounding, mind-bending tale told in backward-jumping reverse, featuring a hero (Guy Pearce) without short-term memory, and Carrie Ann Moss as a potential *femme fatale*
- **The Man Who Wasn't There (2001)**, the Coen Brothers' semi-parody of *film noir* with impressive b/w cinematography from Roger Deakins, starred Billy Bob Thornton as a deadpanning, unassuming



cuckolded barber Ed Crane, alongside his scheming wife Francis McDormand

- David Lynch's complex and unconventional **Mulholland Dr. (2001)** had two *femme fatales*, each with two personas: the light Betty/Diane (Naomi Watts) and dark Rita/Camilla (Laura Elena Harring), both caught in a nightmarish, Los Angeles web of corruption after opening Pandora's Box
- co-director Robert Rodriguez' monochrome R-rated **Sin City (2005)** with computer-generated visuals was based on Frank Miller's comic book tale about a corrupt seedy metropolis with rain-slicked streets, and all the noir requisites: a voice-over narration (by Josh Hartnett), a tough-guy hero/ex-con named Marv (Mickey Rourke), a sexy and manipulative *femme fatale* named Gail (Rosario Dawson), an aging policeman named Hartigan (Bruce Willis) protective of exotic stripper/dancer Nancy (Jessica Alba) - and more

Tech-Noirs:

Tech-noirs are modern-day noirs set in futuristic settings. 'Cyberpunk' was first popularized by William Gibson's 1984 book *Neuromancer*, and best exemplified in the late 70s-90s with the following cyber-noir films:

- [Alien \(1979\)](#)
- **Outland (1981)**
- Ridley Scott's sci-fi thriller ★ [Blade Runner \(1982\)](#) set its film noirish story in a decaying, tech-noir LA society of the future, with Harrison Ford as a futuristic, LA 'blade-running' detective intent on killing replicant-androids.
- **Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984)**
- [The Terminator \(1984\)](#)
- **Robocop (1987)**
- Steve de Jarnatt's chilling apocalyptic film noir **Miracle Mile (1989)** told about a musician (Anthony Edwards) who intercepted a phone booth call from a panicked missile silo operator and accidentally learned that a nuclear war had just been initiated
- **Total Recall (1990)**
- Wim Wenders' **Until the End of the World (1991)**
- **Johnny Mnemonic (1995)**, a derivative adaptation of scriptwriter William Gibson's own cyberpunk short story, and a Keanu Reeves-precursor to **The Matrix (1999)**, about a courier with downloaded information in his data-packed head who must transport the top-secret data from China to New Jersey
- Kathryn Bigelow's film noir thriller **Strange Days (1995)** set on Millenium New Years Eve, featured a hustler (Ralph Fiennes) who sold sexy and violent digital content fed directly into the cortex of the brain, and involving black-marketing of Virtual Reality discs plugged straight into the cortex
- the cyber-age thriller **Virtuosity (1995)**, with Russell Crowe as computer-generated SID 6.7 (Sadistic, Intelligent, Dangerous) - a virtual reality killer pitted against LA police officer Denzel Washington
- New Zealand screenwriter Andrew Niccol's directorial debut film **Gattaca (1997)** about futuristic genetic engineering
- Alex Proyas' labyrinthine, visually-inspiring tech-noir **Dark City (1998)**, a combination of science fiction (inspired by **Metropolis (1927)**) and crime melodrama with the motif of a whirlpool, was also set in a futuristic, post-modern, and dark urban locale with a story about a malevolent alien race
- David Cronenberg's twisting, game-related **eXistenZ (1999)**
- **The Matrix (1999)**, in which reality was a computer simulation, and the actual Earth was scorched
- **The Thirteenth Floor (1999)**
- Steven Spielberg's cyber-noirish action film **Minority Report (2002)**, set in the futuristic year of 2054 from an adapted Philip K. Dick story; with Tom Cruise as a cop preventing pre-committed murders



Selection of Greatest *Film Noir*:

Greatest of Early and Classic *Film Noir*:

[I Am a Fugitive From A Chain Gang \(1932\)](#)

Fury (1936)

[The Letter \(1940\)](#)

★ [Rebecca \(1940\)](#)

Stranger on the Third Floor (1940)

★ [Citizen Kane \(1941\)](#)

High Sierra (1941)
★ [The Maltese Falcon \(1941\)](#)
Suspicion (1941)
The Glass Key (1942)
This Gun For Hire (1942)
[Shadow of a Doubt \(1943\)](#)
[Laura \(1944\)](#)
★ [Double Indemnity \(1944\)](#)
[Gaslight \(1944\)](#)
The Lodger (1944)
The Mask of Dimitrios (1944)
Murder, My Sweet (1944)
Phantom Lady (1944)
The Suspect (1944)
[To Have and Have Not \(1944\)](#)
The Woman in the Window (1944)
Cornered (1945)
Detour (1945)
Fallen Angel (1945)
The House on 92nd Street (1945)
Leave Her to Heaven (1945)
[The Lost Weekend \(1945\)](#)
[Mildred Pierce \(1945\)](#)
Scarlet Street (1945)
Spellbound (1945)
★ [The Big Sleep \(1946\)](#)
The Blue Dahlia (1946)
Cornered (1946)
The Dark Corner (1946)
[Gilda \(1946\)](#)
[The Killers \(1946\)](#)
Lady In The Lake (1946)
★ [Notorious \(1946\)](#)
[The Postman Always Rings Twice \(1946\)](#)
The Strange Love of Martha Ivers (1946)
The Stranger (1946)
Body and Soul (1947)
Brute Force (1947)
Crossfire (1947)
Dark Passage (1947)
Dead Reckoning (1947)
Kiss of Death (1947)
Nightmare Alley (1947)
★ [Out of the Past \(1947\)](#)
Ride the Pink Horse (1947)
T-Men (1947)
The Big Clock (1948)
Call Northside 777 (1948)
Cry of the City (1948)
The Dark Past (1948)
Force of Evil (1948)
Key Largo (1948)
[The Lady From Shanghai \(1948\)](#)
The Naked City (1948)
Raw Deal (1948)
Road House (1948)
Ruthless (1948)
Sorry, Wrong Number (1948)
Act of Violence (1949)
[Beyond the Forest \(1949\)](#)
Champion (1949)
Criss Cross (1949)
[Gun Crazy \(1949\)](#) (or 1950) (aka Deadly is the Female)
The Set-Up (1949)
They Live By Night (1949)
★ [The Third Man \(1949\)](#)

[White Heat \(1949\)](#)
[The Asphalt Jungle \(1950\)](#)
 D. O. A. (1950)
 In a Lonely Place (1950)
 Night and the City (1950)
 Panic in the Streets (1950)
 ★ [Sunset Boulevard \(1950\)](#)
 Where the Sidewalk Ends (1950)
 The Big Carnival (1951) (aka Ace in the Hole)
 On Dangerous Ground (1951)
 Strangers on a Train (1951)
 The Narrow Margin (1952)
 Scandal Sheet (1952)
 Sudden Fear (1952)
[The Big Heat \(1953\)](#)
 Niagara (1953)
 Pickup on South Street (1953)
 Crime Wave (1954)
 The Big Combo (1955)
 The Desperate Hours (1955)
 Diabolique (Fr.) (1955)
[Kiss Me Deadly \(1955\)](#)
 ★ [The Night of the Hunter \(1955\)](#)
 Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (1956)
 Crime in the Streets (1956)
 The Killing (1956)
 While the City Sleeps (1956)
 The Wrong Man (1956)
[Sweet Smell of Success \(1957\)](#)
 ★ [Touch of Evil \(1958\)](#)
 ★ [Vertigo \(1958\)](#)
 Odds Against Tomorrow (1959)

Greatest of Modern *Film Noir* (Post-Noir or Neo-Noir):

[The Manchurian Candidate \(1962\)](#)
 Point Blank (1967)
 St. Valentine's Day Massacre (1967)
 Bullitt (1968)
 Madigan (1968)
[Dirty Harry 'series' \(1971-76\)](#)
 Klute (1971)
 The Long Goodbye (1973)
 Serpico (1973)
 ★ [Chinatown \(1974\)](#)
[The Conversation \(1974\)](#)
 Death Wish (1974)
 The Parallax View (1974)
 Farewell, My Lovely (1975)
 Night Moves (1975)
 Three Days of the Condor (1975)
 The Late Show (1977)
[Body Heat \(1981\)](#)
 The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981)
 ★ [Blade Runner \(1982\)](#)
 Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (1982)
 Hammett (1983)
 Against All Odds (1984)
 Blood Simple (1984)
[Blue Velvet \(1986\)](#)
 Black Widow (1987)
 House of Games (1987)
 D. O. A. (1988)
 Kill Me Again (1989)
 After Dark, My Sweet (1990)
 The Grifters (1990)

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1990)
The Hot Spot (1990)
Wild at Heart (1990)
Dead Again (1991)
A Kiss Before Dying (1991)
[Basic Instinct \(1992\)](#)
Night and the City (1992)
The Public Eye (1992)
Red Rock West (1992)
The Last Seduction (1993)
Devil in a Blue Dress (1995)
Heat (1995)
Se7en (1995)
Strange Days (1995)
The Underneath (1995)
The Usual Suspects (1995)
Bound (1996)
[Fargo \(1996\)](#)
Face/Off (1997)
L.A. Confidential (1997)
The Spanish Prisoner (1997)
Dark City (1998)
Memento (2000)
The Man Who Wasn't There (2001)
Mulholland Dr. (2001)
Femme Fatale (2002)
Sin City (2005)