

## Our favourite gangster movies

The long-delayed release of *Gangster Squad* has had us raiding our brains for the most memorable mob movies ever made. *Rob Garratt* grabs his Tommy gun

Ever since Josef von Sternberg's 1927 gangland melodrama *Underworld*, which was widely recognised as the first conventional gangster film, mob movies have been among film buffs' favourites. Maybe it's the format, which allows a balanced, insider look at a group of people that is far more intimate than, say, the goodies-versus-baddies perspective of a western. Maybe it's the realism of the genre: in any era, real gangs of smugglers, forgers, dealers and murderers exist. Or maybe it's just the intoxicating whiff of the underworld that the genre delivers by the bucket-load.

Either way, a prime example of the genre lands in cinemas this week. Originally set for release last September, *Gangster Squad*'s launch was delayed in the wake of shootings in an American cinema in July because it contained a scene – already screened in an early trailer – showing gangsters shooting cinemagoers through the screen.

On paper, *Gangster Squad* has all the crucial elements. It's set in the classic noir city of LA, during the gangster heyday of the '40s. It's also based on a true story: it chronicles how the LAPD, led by Josh Brolin's Sergeant John O'Mara, took on real-life gangland kingpin Mickey Cohen, played here by Sean Penn. To celebrate the movie's release, we've rounded up some of our favourite gangster movies of all time. *Gangster Squad* is in UAE cinemas from January 24. Read our review on the opposite page.

### Carlito's Way (1993)

Brian de Palma's other great movie with Al Pacino, following 1983's *Scarface*, was an incredible display of virtuosity for both actor and director. The plot – an ex-con fresh from prison who fights to go straight – may be textbook, but De Palma's Hitchcock-inspired direction comes alive in the lengthy set pieces, while Pacino looks every inch the legend he's come to be.

### Get Carter (1971)

Perhaps the UK's best-known mob movie – and the one that truly defined Michael Caine's hardman credentials.

*Get Carter* used its grimy setting in northern England to make a timely statement on contemporary British life, painting a gloomy picture of the crime underworld, mirrored in its vision of a nation slowly made to face its own moral and physical dilapidation.

### The Godfather Part II (1974)

Film fans lose days of their lives arguing over which of the first two *Godfather* films is the best – see the first instalment for free at Blue Flame at 7pm on Thursday 24 (04 230 8580). The first was tighter, simpler, more revolutionary; the second longer and darker, with Pacino's notable shift from innocent self-denial to a detached underworld lord capable of fratricide.

### Infernal Affairs (2002)

The team behind *Infernal Affairs* looked at the tired undercover cop concept (see *Donnie Brasco* et al) and realised they liked it – but decided to level the playing field by giving the triads an undercover rat to infiltrate the police. Far tighter, shorter, emotive and more realistic than Martin Scorsese's remake *The Departed*, the Chinese title of this Hong Kong hit invokes the lowest circle of Buddhist hell, a fair indication of how noir things get.

### The Killing (1965)

Characteristically Kubrick in both its mechanistic coldness and its vision of human endeavour undone by greed and deceit, this noir-ish heist movie is nevertheless far more satisfying than most of his later work, thanks to a lack of bombastic pretensions and the style fitting the subject matter, and the director's essentially heartless, beady-eyed observation of human foibles.

### The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (1976)

John Cassavetes doesn't believe in the kind of demands that gangsters make on a film, enforcing clichés of action and behaviour in return for a few cheap thrills. The result is that his two gangster films – this



and *Gloria* – easily rate as his best work, crisscrossed as they are by all sorts of contradictory impulses. The hero/heroine is reluctantly propelled through the plot, trying to stay far enough ahead of the game to prevent his/her own act being closed down.

### Le Samourai (1967)

French new-wave auteur Jean-Pierre Melville dug Hitchcock's moody sense of suspense, but imbued the Hollywood thriller with a continental sensitivity, creating a series of film noir masterpieces that were driven by the beating of a more human heart. *Le Samourai* is an austere masterpiece. Melville turns a simple alibi plot into a mythical revenge story, with Cathy Rosier as the piano-playing

nemesis who might just as easily have stepped from the pages of Cocteau, Sophocles or *Vogue*.

### Mean Streets (1973)

Long before Martin Scorsese marched into the multiplex with gangster staples *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, he crafted this cheap, arty, human take on the underworld. Paired with Robert de Niro for the first of nine collaborations to date (many of them considered classics), Scorsese's third full feature borrowed much from his first, *Who's That Knocking at My Door?*, to paint an autobiographical portrait of the world of petty crime in New York's Little Italy in which the director grew up, and ultimately transcended. *All available at www.amazon.co.uk.*

► NEXT WEEK: Daniel Day-Lewis discusses his Golden Globe-winning performance in *Lincoln*