THE
BIG CRIME
Film Noir Roleplaying

A Cynthia Celeste Miller Production

THE BIG CRIME

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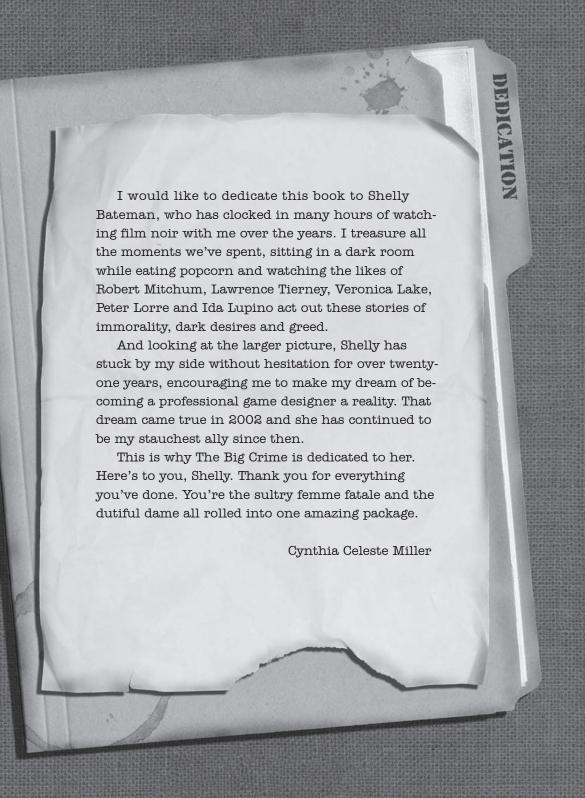Shelly Bateman................ Violet Morgan
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I would like to dedicate this book to Shelly Bateman, who has clocked in many hours of watching film noir with me over the years. I treasure all the moments we've spent, sitting in a dark room while eating popcorn and watching the likes of Robert Mitchum, Lawrence Tierney, Veronica Lake, Peter Lorre and Ida Lupino act out these stories of immorality, dark desires and greed.

And looking at the larger picture, Shelly has stuck by my side without hesitation for over twenty-one years, encouraging me to make my dream of becoming a professional game designer a reality. That dream came true in 2002 and she has continued to be my stauchest ally since then.

This is why The Big Crime is dedicated to her. Here's to you, Shelly. Thank you for everything you've done. You're the sultry femme fatale and the dutiful dame all rolled into one amazing package.

Cynthia Celeste Miller

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Chapter 1:
Introduction

Film Noir

Film noir exists in a world almost identical to our own world during the 1940s and '50s. *Almost* identical. The word "almost" has to be emphasized because this cinematic take on a bygone era is darker and more pessimistic than the world actually was. During the daylight hours, it was indeed more or less identical, give or take a few shadows here and there. But once the sun gave way to the moon's eerie light, everything changed. Shadows became longer, the streets became more sinister, the city became a vastly more dangerous place; a true jungle constructed of steel, asphalt and corruption.

In these motion pictures, society's collective fears, doubts, and even desires spilled across the big screen in a way scarcely understood by those watching them. The filmmakers managed to tap into the collective subconscious of a society that repressed its thoughts and feelings about the world and the people that populated it. Through film noir, filmgoers could alleviate the negative thoughts that ran through their heads by experiencing it all in living black-and-white. Perhaps it was a release or perhaps it was oddly comforting for them to see that others had these exact same thoughts. Misery loves company after all.

Whatever the case may have been, film noir spoke to the audiences, making them want to come back time after time for a gritty dose of greed, moral ambiguity, and desperation.

Defining what film noir is, however, isn't an easy task. Film historians have debated for decades whether it's a style or a genre. Strong arguments have been made on both sides of the debate, but ultimately it makes little difference. Film noir is what it is: a type of movie that contains its own set of distinctions and trappings. For the sake of clarity and because it focuses exclusively on crime thrillers (rather than noir-like westerns, sci-fi or other settings), this book will refer to it as a genre.

At its heart, film noir is largely about crime in one form or another. In fact, it is widely considered to be the direct descendent of the gangster films from the 1930s. It's certainly difficult to dismiss that notion, as there are numerous similarities. Film noir, though, has evolved greatly since then, both in terms of style and content. Gone is the glorification of the American mobster and the assumption that policemen are courageous, moral crime fighters who stop at nothing to right wrongs. These fixtures have been replaced by the humanization of criminals and the proliferation of the archetypal crooked cop. The only things that are black and white in film noir are the stark, menacing shadows. Everything else resides in a blur of grays. Even the protagonists are flawed or, worse, downright rotten to the core. This is, without a doubt, a large part of the appeal of film noir.

So, what is film noir exactly? Symbolism and social commentary aside, film noir is a film genre that represents the darker part of our souls; the part we really don't want people to know exists. But it does exist and these movies quench the needs driven by the ugly side of us all. These are films about desperate, imperfect people who ultimately make lousy decisions or take part in activities that would be ill advised under any circumstances. These are films that chronicle the seedier side of humanity, wherein morality is a commodity to be cherished or wasted with wild abandon. Most importantly, these are films in which style is equally as important as substance. Rain-soaked streets, blinking neon lights, swanky nightclubs, looming buildings, dingy, half-lit apartments, twisting back alleys. It is here that a myriad of shifty or unusual characters dwell in the darkest recesses of the night – corrupt cops, hard-boiled private detectives, sultry femmes fatales, small time crooks, hired thugs, smarmy racketeers, and naïve wives. It's time to visit an all-too familiar, yet distinctly foreign, world. Welcome to *The Big Crime*.

The Big Crime

The Big Crime is a roleplaying game that allows you and your friends to step into the dark and dangerous world of film noir. The game rules are designed to be easy to learn, fast to play, and true to the genre. Make no mistake, however. This is not a generic game that can be used to delve into other genres. So, if you're looking to cut down orcs in a subterranean dungeon or engage in action-packed starship dogfights, you're barking up the wrong tree. Every single aspect of *The Big Crime* is devoted to the themes and nuances of film noir.

If you like the thought of playing a disillusioned WWII veteran trying to find his place in the world or a frantic criminal on the lam from the law, then you've checked into the right motel room. Does roleplaying amidst a tarnished cityscape full of perpetual unscrupulousness and vile deeds get your imagination churning? If so, then *The Big Crime* is a custom fit for you. Does playing out a dangerous heist or running for your life from violent mobsters sound like a good time? Should you answer in the affirmative, you should feel right at home here.

The Big Crime works is intended to be a one-shot game. That is, the characters aren't held over from one story to the next. Much like the films that inspired it, this game is designed to tell a story involving a set of characters that will never appear again. As often as not, it will be because those characters end up with tags on their toes.

The Definition of Roleplaying

The roleplaying game (or RPG) is a unique beast as far as games are concerned. There are no losers, only winners. The goal of the game is to collaboratively tell an exciting and dramatic story and if that occurs, everyone wins. Roleplaying can best be thought of as interactive, improv theatre.

Most of the participants are referred to as the *players*. Each player creates his own alter ego that he will portray during the game. This alter ego is called a Primary Character (or PC). One participant, however, doesn't create a single character to play. This participant, known as the Director, is the primary storyteller. He's the one who sets up the basic storyline, adjudicates the rules, and takes

on the roles of the characters the Primary Characters meet (called Secondary Characters – or SCs).

Previously, RPGs were likened to interactive improv theatre. While this is a relatively appropriate analogy, there is one hitch. In RPGs, everything is done verbally. Nobody has to get up and act things out, nor do they need props. It's actually just a group of friends gathered around a table, orally describing the scenes and the actions of the various characters.

The game functions best with one Director and one player, though it's possible to accommodate a couple more players.

It must be noted that the PCs don't always operate as a team, as is the case in many roleplaying games. Some PCs may be on the same side; others might not be. It's perfectly acceptable for one PC to be a criminal while another PC is a police detective doggedly trying to bring him to justice.

What You Need

One swell aspect of RPGs is that you don't need to acquire many material items in order to play them. In the case of *The Big Crime*, you're going to have to get

your mitts on a pencil, a character sheet, and a handful of six-sided dice (d6s), eight-sided dice (d8s) and ten-sided dice (d10s). As long as the participants have access to about six or eight of each type of die, you should be fine.

The Director will need some extra supplies, including a copy of this book and scratch paper. Additionally, it is advisable to print the Setback Tokens, Genre Points and Director Points out on cardstock. These can be found on pages XX – XX. Alternatively, you can simply use poker chips, glass beads or other counters.

Personal Pronouns

Throughout this book, the author has elected to use male-specific personal pronouns. The reason for taking this approach rather than one of the more politically correct options is that film noir was almost exclusively told from a male perspective. This was most evident in the voiceover narrations and other similar narrative devices. Given that *The Big Crime* was designed to emulate film noir in every way possible, the decision was an easy one.

Inside This Book

The book you hold in your hands is organized in such a way that you can read it from cover to cover with minimal references to rules that you haven't learned about yet.

Chapter One: Introduction
There's no reason to go over all this information, since you've already read it by this point. You know what it's about.

Chapter Two: Film Noir Defined
Chapter One gave you the basics of what film noir is, but this chapter explores it more fully. If you walk away from the chapter and still don't know what makes film noir so special, then you haven't read it very thoroughly.

Chapter Three: The Game System
This is where you'll learn how the game actually plays. Everything a player needs to know can be found here.

Chapter Four: Character Creation
Now that you understand film noir and the game rules, it's time to make your character. This chapter teaches you how to do that.

Chapter Five: The Players
Learn all the tips for being a good player.

Chapter Six: The Director
If you aren't planning to act as the Director, you should stop reading here. This chapter is divided into two sections: one for running the game and another for creating films.

Chapter Seven: "Search By Night"
This chapter contains a fully fleshed-out, ready to run film, complete with maps, character stats and pre-generated PCs.

Chapter 2:
Film Noir Defined

Film noir is crime; the type that epitomizes all of humankind's worst characteristics. Film noir is morally ambiguous men and women running amok in the urban jungle, scratching and clawing to reach whatever goals the city allows them to have. Film noir is alienation, fear and despondency manifested as cinema. Film noir is dark streets that slither their way through the bottom of the canyons constructed of glass, concrete and steel. Film noir is labyrinthine storytelling made all the more difficult to follow by narrative devices like flashbacks and flash-forwards.

Film noir is all that and much more besides.

This chapter is dedicated to exploring some of the more important elements that are hallmarks of these brooding motion pictures.

Visual Style

The visual style that defined film noir is unmistakable. The filmmakers utilized low-key lighting to create harsh contrasts between light and darkness. In the world of noir, no shadow was accidental. Great pains were taken to use them to frame shots, produce a mood, or direct the viewer's eye. It has been said that the shadows were as much characters as the characters themselves.

Shadows weren't the only distinctive feature of film noir cinematography. Another characteristic was the dramatic use of camera positioning. The oblique-angle shot, in which the camera was tilted to the side, was a common device used to produce an uneasy, uncomfortable feeling in those watching the movie. Low-angled shots were used to give characters a more imposing or menacing visage. Wide-angle lenses were employed to obtain more room for scenes or to evoke an empty, lonely mood.

Single-source lighting was another defining affection. This created a despondent vibe for the more desperate or uncomfortable scenes, as evidenced by the final sequence in *The Big Combo* (1955), in which a far-away spotlight swept back and forth to provide the lighting. Another favorite source of lighting was from blinking neon signs in the background, often filtered in through Venetian blinds in a nearby window.

In short, the filmmakers experimented wildly with the cinematography to achieve whatever ambiance they felt best fit the story.

Storytelling Style

The telltale sign of film noir storytelling is the complex, intricate, and often convoluted plots. The convolution was often derived from an abundance of flashbacks and flashforwards that tended to disrupt the standard time frame of the stories. If you don't pay attention, you'll most likely be completely lost in a matter of minutes.

The action sequences of the genre are decidedly far and few between. But when they *do* occur, they happen at breakneck speed

and with all the suddenness of a gunshot. It must also be noted that they are inclined to be more than a little violent.

Speaking of violence, one thing that sometimes shocks modern audiences about film noir is how utterly brutal it can be. While the actual bloodshed was kept at a minimum, the implication of bloodshed was all the more disturbing because of it. Despite this, the filmmakers seemed to thrive on the shock value of allowing characters to be viciously slain at the drop of a proverbial hat. Secondary Characters and Primary Characters alike were always in grave danger, which significantly heightened the suspense. The viewer was kept entirely off guard as a result.

Nothing in film noir was any more shocking than the scenes that concluded each movie. While some of the movies sported happy endings, most of them ended on a negative note. Death, despair, loss, and tragedy were all common elements of the final sequences.

The Environment

Daylight was something that seldom showed itself in film noir, as most of the activity took place after dark. On the occasions that daylight was depicted on screen, it was usually muddled or downplayed in some way, either by having it filtered through Venetian blinds or by keeping the scenes minimal in length. Some films noir were more open to daytime sequences than others, but the world (especially the underworld) began to come alive once the sun went down.

Whether it was daytime or nighttime, the favored environment was "the city". The urban landscape provided the perfect backdrop for these dark vignettes of alienation, pessimism, and disenchantment.

Unlike the wilderness, cities are completely man-made. They were created by us as some kind of twisted, idealized utopias that have long since been stained and tarnished by our own greedy ambitions. The cities are our own dark souls made reality.

It should come as no surprise that the cities perfectly embodied the very dark themes that ran rampant in film noir. For one thing, cities were viewed partly with contempt in those days… or at the very least, with suspicion. The advent of the urban metropolis was fairly recent at that point in time. Even forty or fifty years prior to the onset of film noir, the cities still resembled large towns rather than the asphalt monstrosities they had become. And as we all know, human nature insists that

we distrust anything that is new to us. Cities of this magnitude fell into that category for many people. Not everyone looked at things this way though, including many of the filmmakers. It was also common for people to view the modern city with awe and fascination, much like a child would a new toy. Despite the fact that the city reflected all the worst elements of the human psyche, it just as aptly reflected our most lofty dreams and desires. This enchantment played into the genre just as much as the loathing of the American city. For all its vileness, the urban landscape possessed an undeniable allure.

Within the city, the potential for intriguing locations is limitless. The filmmakers fully realized this and offered viewers a plethora of places that furthered the look and feel so intrinsic to the genre, from run-down backrooms and shoddy apartments to seedy motels and dank warehouses on the waterfront. There was no shortage of mood-inspiring sites to be found in the city.

Sometimes, however, the stories told in film noir escaped to crowded urban nightmare. Such stories were still as brooding

as those set entirely within the confines of the city. In fact, the contrast between the two settings allowed for some interesting juxtaposition that served to actually enhance the brooding nature of the genre. What better way to characterize the rural environment as being wholesome than to contrast it by also letting us see the contemptible city?

In many of the movies, the countryside represented freedom -- freedom from the smog-choked city, freedom from the evil that strangled the few remaining honest citizens, freedom from all the pressures and temptations found within the proximity of the urban environment. This is exemplified by characters fleeing into the countryside, which was a common occurrence in film noir. Little did they know that the purity of the rural environment was a façade. The shadows cast by the trees and rustic farm structures were just as malicious as the ones cast by the skyscrapers and tenements. Trouble followed the characters of film noir to whatever locale they tried to take sanctuary in, for that was their lot in life.

The Themes

As mentioned previously in this book, crime was almost invariably at the core of all films noir. Murder was the most common form of crime that took center stage in these terse stories, but it wasn't an exclusive deal. There was room for just about any type of crime, including extortion, racketeering, kidnapping, smuggling, and just about anything else the black heart of humanity has dreamed up. If it's morally wrong, you can bet the mortgage that someone has engaged in it and has made a profit from doing so. The motivation for committing such crimes ran the gamut. Good old-fashioned greed probably topped the list, followed closely by jealousy and desperation.

Romance was also a principal theme in film noir, though it wasn't typically as pure as depicted in other types of fiction. One might even argue that the majority of the romance revolved around lust rather than love. The frequent sexual overtones and innuendo were enough to lend credibility to such a claim. It was this theme that gave rise to the manipulative, seductive femme fatale, an archetype used repeatedly throughout the existence of film noir.

Another prominent theme was that no matter how far away a character runs, he can never escape his past; his transgressions simply cannot be buried. It all comes back to haunt him in a way that invariably sends his life into complete disarray and threatens to destroy him in every way possible.

The Characters

For the most part, the characters in film noir were normal, everyday people just like you and me. They weren't action heroes in the modern sense, nor were they always individuals that could easily be labeled as "good guys" or "bad guys". Those concepts were relatively rare in film noir. No, the characters found here were normal folks, albeit normal folks with a turbulent future ahead and, just as likely, a turbulent past as well. In most cases, they were flawed (sometimes cripplingly so) and morally questionable. The characters had gambling problems, alcohol addictions, abusive tendencies, hateful demeanors, or a weakness for dishy dames with long gams. One of the primary differences between the protagonists of film noir and those found in modern cinema is that

the former were as often as not unlikable or even unabashedly deplorable. Modern protagonists may sometimes have a negative quirk, but seldom to the degree of the film noir protagonists.

It's time to come clean about something, though. Throughout this book, the characters of the genre have been painted as being universally nasty souls with few redeeming qualities. This is a generalization that could be construed as unfair, for some of film noir's denizens are decent and honest people. They're in the minority, mind you, but they do exist. The classic hard-boiled private dicks are the most likely to fall into this category. Aside from them, the honest characters are inclined to be victims – fall guys, scapegoats, or poor schleps who get taken advantage of by femmes fatales, con men and other social predators. In film noir, nice guys (and gals) usually finish last; private eyes aside, of course.

Gender

In the films noir produced during the 1940s and '50s, there was a very distinct line between how men and women were portrayed. By and large, men were strong, tough and unflinching; they didn't cry and they were the masters of their realm. Women, on the other hand, were either good-hearted and nurturing or scheming and duplicitous. There were exceptions both ways (Christopher Cross from *Scarlet Street* could hardly be called strong), but they were far and few between, especially for women.

The most common theory for why this was the case goes like this: While the Second World War raged on overseas, women stepped up to the plate and took factory jobs and the like, effectively emancipating themselves from the kitchen to a certain degree. This didn't always sit well with the men, many of

gender roles in many ways. She was fiercely independent and willing to commit atrocities to stay that way or to get ahead in the world. This dragon lady embodied everything that was "wrong" about the modern woman.

Eight Essential Films Noir

Assembling a comprehensive list of films noir is far beyond the scope of this book. Such a job would surely necessitate its *own* book. That having been said, below you will find a selection of films noir that shouldn't be missed by *The Big Crime* players and Directors.

You'll no doubt notice that many quintessential films noir are absent from the list (*White Heat*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Maltese Falcon*, etc.). This was no accident. The intent wasn't so much to provide you with a list of the *best* films noir as it was to present a selection that will be useful for gamers and cover many of the themes and nuances the genre has to offer.

The Asphalt Jungle (1950)

With funding from a crooked lawyer, recently paroled criminal mastermind "Doc"

Riedenschneider assembles a crack group of veteran crooks to pull off a highly lucrative heist. Things go south, as they often do, and the entire situation unravels before the audience's eyes.

The Asphalt Jungle is the definitive heist flick that embodies nearly every aspect of film noir. It has it all – criminal specialists, police corruption, a naïve mistress, a truly flawed central protagonist, an in-depth look at the criminal underworld, and a suitably unhappy ending. It also serves as a good example of how If you see just one film noir, this one wouldn't be a bad choice.

Double Indemnity (1944)

This film tells the story of an insurance salesman who finds himself entwined in a plot to kill a woman's husband. A tenacious investigator thinks it's foul play and may suspect his co-worker and the recently widowed femme fatale.

Double Indemnity is widely considered one of the genre's best films… and for good reason. First and foremost, the movie's mood must be commended, as its use of shadows is creative and atmospheric. It's also worth noting that almost the entire

movie is presented as a flashback with a voice-over narrative by the primary character (i.e., the insurance salesman). Finally, the seductive femme fatale is masterful in her ability to bend the will of the opposite sex. If you want to experience how a femme fatale can drive a story, then look no further than this gem.

The Big Sleep (1946)

Private detective Philip Marlowe calls on a new client, General Sternwood, who wants him to deal with a man who has been blackmailing his youngest daughter. The General's seemingly straight-laced older sister suspects that her father has an ulterior motive: to find his friend who had disappeared a month earlier. Marlowe ends up getting hip-deep in the complex mess that left even the screenwriters scratching their heads. Seriously.

Trust me when I say that the story only gets more perplexing from there. Not in a bad way, mind you, but certainly enough to prohibit the printing of the full summary here. *The Big Sleep* isn't the first film noir to star Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, but it's the best (at least in this author's

whom were returning home from the battlefields to find a new breed of independent woman; a breed that had learned to fend for themselves. This dissatisfaction spilled over into the films, which were made predominantly by males.

In creating these movies, the filmmakers created a societal utopia: an idealized society that harkened back to the way things were – strong men and dependent women who cried at the drop of a hat.

So, what about the classic femme fatale? How did she fit into this? The femme fatale represented a direct attack on traditional female

opinion). If you want to run a game that prominently features a private eye, then you should give this movie a serious look, as Bogart's Marlowe is absolutely the definitive gumshoe. The movie boasts witty dialogue, sexual tension, a femme fatale (with a soft spot for the protagonist, no less), extortion, murder, and much more.
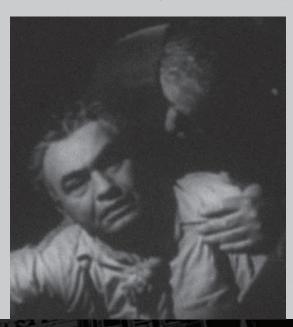
Raw Deal (1948)

Joe Sullivan, a man who took the fall for a crime he didn't commit, escapes from prison with the help of his girlfriend, Pat, and sets in motion their plan to leave the country. When things go awry, the couple kidnaps a social worker named Pam, sparking a wonderfully doomed love triangle. Joe learns that he was betrayed by the sadistic, pyromaniac mobster, Rick Coyle, and decides that revenge is in order.

Raw Deal is violent and hypersexual, and is one of the darkest, shadow-infested films noir ever made. The cinematography is just stunning! This film was selected for inclusion here for many reasons. For one thing, the aforementioned love triangle is tense and shows what a game of *The Big Crime* could be like with three players.

For another thing, the pacing of the movie is something that Directors should take note of before running the game. Then, there's the remarkably flawed central character (Joe), the imposing yet worried antagonist (Rick) and the ending that was about an inch away from being happy.

Scarlet Street (1945)

Christopher Cross is a milquetoast man who is married to a domineering, nagging wife. But then he meets Kitty March, who seduces him, erroneously believing him to be a famous painter and wanting to sap him for everything she can. He falls for her hard, proving to be the worst mistake of his life, one that he'll regret forever.

Scarlet Street is a bleak psychological thriller masterfully directed by Fritz Lang and starring Edward G. Robinson, who flexed his acting muscles as the timid and meek Christopher Cross. This movie is all about the shockingly brutal climax, which was instrumental in it being banned in Milwaukee, Atlanta and the entire state of New York. This is the perfect example of how a good, soft-spoken man can be driven to extreme behavior by a conniving spider woman.

Born To Kill (1947)

It's a match made in Hell in this unrelentingly grim noir thriller, when murderous psychopath Sam Wild meets soulless manipulator, Helen Brent. She keeps her distance, so he courts and marries her wealthy (but naïve) foster sister, Georgia. Sam and Helen find themselves wrapped up in a lurid lust affair that turns ugly… very ugly!

Born To Kill is a perverse pleasure to behold, as real-life bad boy, Lawrence Tierney, and Claire Trevor truly clock in memorable performances. Watch them as they finagle, manipulate and maneuver each other and everyone around them! This is a prime example of

a film that focuses on two terrible, black-hearted people as the main characters. If you're a Director interested in running a game featuring characters of that nature, *Born To Kill* is your blueprint.

Out of the Past (1947)

Jeff Bailey is a friendly but slightly mysterious proprietor of a mountain-village gas station. Little does anyone know, Jeff has a shady past that threatens to turn his world upside down, including his engagement to local girl, Ann Miller. When a man from Jeff's past comes rolling into town, that threat becomes all too real. Soon, he finds himself caught up in the murky waters of his former existence, entangled with the deceitful Kathie Moffat and crooked Whit Sterling.

Many noir historians consider *Out of the Past* to be *the* textbook example of the genre. Frankly, it's hard to disagree with that assessment. The performances by Robert Mitchum, Jane Greer and Kirk Douglas are flawless and the whirlwind story that unfolds via flashbacks keeps you engrossed from the opening credits until the screen goes black. This movie is the total package!

Touch of Evil (1958)

The setting: a sweltering U.S./Mexican border town. The situation: While on his honeymoon, Mexican-born policeman, Mike Vargas, agrees to investigate a car bombing and ends up rubbing corrupt local police chief, Hank Quinlan, the wrong way. Quinlan wants the upstanding Vargas out of his hair so badly that he makes a deal with a crime boss to frame his new bride for drugs. The entire situation spirals out of control and leads to an atmospheric showdown at the climax of the movie.

The opening sequence – a three-minute, twenty-second tracking shot – is a thing of artistic beauty and is widely renowned among film aficionados for being among the best shots of its type in cinema history. And that's just the beginning of the movie! *Touch of Evil* oozes blistering, sweaty, shadowy atmosphere with its immaculate cinematography. Additionally the story is tersely penned and the acting is phenomenal. These things combined make for some absolutely harrowing scenes that push the noir envelope.

Other Suggestions

The eight films noir listed in the previous section is but a drop in the bucket. There are literally hundreds of great specimens of the genre out there, just waiting to be watched. Film noir has never before been so accessible.

Public Domain

Many of the film noir titles (including one of the entries in the "Eight Essentials" list) are in the public domain and can be legally watched or downloaded for free. We highly recommend you take full advantage of this. Here are eight public domain films noir we suggest (aside from *Scarlet Street*, which has already been listed):

• **Blonde Ice (1948):** A female "society reporter" does whatever she has to do in order to keep herself in the headlines… including murder.
• **D.O.A. (1950):** A poisoned man races against the clock to solve his own murder and bring his killer to justice.
• **Detour (1945):** A stroke of bad luck traps a hitchhiker in an ever-tightening noose, complicated by a scheming femme fatale.

• **He Walked By Night (1948):** A cop-killing crook evades the authorities, baffling them at every turn.
• **Kansas City Confidential (1952):** An ex-con is wrongfully accused of involvement in a bank robbery and goes after the crooks that actually pulled the caper off.
• **Quicksand (1950):** A young auto-mechanic slowly descends the slippery slope into a life of crime.
• **The Big Combo (1955):** A police lieutenant goes on a personal crusade against a sadistic gangster and ends up falling for his target's girl.
• **The Killing (1956):** A veteran criminal plans one last heist before hanging it up. Complications arise in true film noir fashion.

Non-Public Domain

This list offers eight more suggestions for those craving more noir. They can generally be found on DVD at an affordable price and are well worth your time.

• **Criss Cross (1949):** A man returns to Los Angeles to find that his ex-wife has taken up with a shady gangster.
• **Gun Crazy (1950):** A gun-obsessed fellow and his psychotic dame set off on a crime spree à la Bonnie and Clyde.

• **In a Lonely Place (1950):** A cynical, down-on-his-luck screenwriter is accused of murder and falls in love with his new neighbor, starting what becomes a twisted relationship.
• **Laura (1944):** While investigating the murder of a beautiful advertising executive, a police detective becomes obsessed with the deceased. The twist in this film is fantastic.
• **The Big Caper (1957):** A con man and his boss's girl pose as a married couple in suburbia in order to pull of a big heist. A truly obscure gem!
• **The Glass Key (1942):** A crooked politician pledges support for a candidate whose daughter he has taken a liking to, angering a sinister political associate in the process.
• **The Maltese Falcon (1941):** A shamus takes a case involving himself with three eccentric criminals, a beautiful femme fatale and their quest for a priceless statuette.
• **Where the Sidewalk Ends (1950):** A brutal, crook-hating police detective accidentally kills a man and covers it up while trying to pin it on a gangster he despises.