

TOP 10 CRIME FILMS

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> It's A CRIME

Here are 10 of the best cop/criminal movies made since G&A's 1958 debut—along with the guns that moved those scripts along.

By Garry James

Crime films have relied on a wide variety of weapons to carry their plots through to the end. Here we see a variety of arms carried in the last 50 years by cinematic police, detectives, hitmen, assassins and desperados. Can you match the movie to the gun?

Photo by Lynne McCready

To celebrate our 50th anniversary, we've compiled some of the best gun films in the "cops and robbers" genre that have come out since 1958, when G&A first hit the stands. What makes a great gun movie? Well, authenticity, super action sequences and fancy hardware. *That's* what.

Study in Terror (1968)

This undeservedly neglected film pits Sherlock Holmes (astutely played by John Neville) against Jack the Ripper. Filled with lots of great Victorian atmosphere, the story moves along smartly to its surprising conclusion. Over the years, so many of the Sherlock Holmes films have been rather indifferent concerning firearms used—but not here. In one scene at Holmes' digs on Baker Street, the great detective introduces us to his sidearm, a Mark II Enfield revolver, and then rather impudently blasts Dr. Watson's (Donald Houston) "Indian vase" to smithereens atop the mantel, much to the good doctor's consternation. This type of British military arm is seen in very few films, and it's one totally appropriate for the period. As the Ripper crimes began in 1888 and the Mark II came out in 1882, the piece is totally time-appropriate. Not only that, its weird shape gives an added sense of mystery to the film; it's an inspired choice, not only as a great sidearm but a super piece of art direction. In fact, the Mark II was featured on the movie's ad posters.

Dirty Harry (1971)

It's hard to imagine a cop as intimately associated with a firearm as Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) and his 6 1/2-inch Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum. These inspired bits of casting (Eastwood and the 29) have slipped into film and firearms legend. The idea came from the fertile mind of John Milius (director and writer of such movies as *Wind and the Lion*, *The Rough Riders*, *Red Dawn*, *Flight of the Intruder*). John is not only a first-rate filmmaker but also a serious gun enthusiast. Though his writing for *Dirty Harry* went uncredited, this was corrected in the sequel, *Magnum Force*. Anyway, from the rousing opening where Harry, hot dog in hand, thwarts a robbery with his 29 through the many other parts of the film in which his trusty sidearm steals the scene, there has never been a better melding of hardware to hero. I remember that a short time after the film came out, Model 29s, especially blued six-inchers, were bringing premium prices and Smith & Wesson could hardly keep up with the orders. Now *that's* a successful gun flick.

The Godfather (1972)

Not only is it one of the great gangster films of all time, *The Godfather*, as well as its sequel *Godfather II*, is among the greatest movies of all time. *The Godfather* is full of very special gunny stuff, a couple of the most memorable scenes being Sonny's (James Caan) toll-booth-machine gun execution and the part where Las Vegas gangster Moe Greene (Alex Rocco) gets plugged through the eye, Bugsy Segal style. The best segment, though, is where Michael (Al Pacino) shoots corrupt police chief Captain McCluskey (Sterling Hayden) and rival mobster Virgil Sollozzo (Al Lettieri) in an Italian restaurant after retrieving a Colt Detective Special that had earlier been hidden behind the tank of the water closet in the men's john. The latter is one of the best-put-together scenes ever filmed using any kind of firearm.

Dillinger (1973)

This is one of my favorite desperado movies and probably the best Dillinger movie around (though the 1945 version was pretty good, too). As the movie was written and directed by John Milius, you know right from the get-go you're going to see some great gun sequences—and you're not disappointed. Warren Oates is perfect as the lead, as are Richard Dreyfuss as Baby Face Nelson, Steve Kanaly as



In *Study In Terror*, Sherlock Holmes (John Neville) brandishes a Mark II Enfield revolver preparatory to tackling the Jack the Ripper case. Photo by Lynne McCready, author's collection

Pretty Boy Floyd and Geoffrey Lewis as Harry Pierpont. Though not exactly historically correct, the shootout at Little Bohemia is spectacular, as is the more authentic ambushing of Dillinger in front of the Biograph Theatre in Chicago by Melvin Purvis and Co. Correct period guns abound, such as Thompsons, BARs, Colt and Smith & Wesson revolvers, and a Winchester Model 97 riot gun. An interesting sidelight is the gun Dillinger's carrying at the Biograph. While it's generally acknowledged that he carried a .380 Colt 1908 Pocket Model, some believe he had a blued .38 Super Government Model. In Milius' version, he is definitely wielding a 1911.

The Godfather II (1974)

Here's one of those rare cases where a sequel is better than the original—and when you're talking about *The Godfather*, that's saying a lot. Though it abounds in great gun scenes, my favorite occurs in the prequel sections of the film featuring Robert De Niro as a young Vito Corleone. In his first meeting with Clemenza, who will become one of his main henchmen, Vito is given a bag of revolvers to hide. Upon opening of the parcel we see a collection of the sort of guns an up-and-coming New York thug would accumulate, including a nickel-plated Merwin, Hulbert & Co. Army revolver—the selfsame gun that Clemenza later brandishes during the theft of an oriental carpet. In one of the film's most riveting sequences, the youthful Vito murders the local strongman, Don Fanucci, by secreting a gun in a towel (which properly catches fire during the shooting). The choice of revolver, a British Mark VI Webley, is interesting in that it would be the sort of gun that might have been brought back by a World War I Doughboy and found its way onto the streets. During his escape, Vito Corleone breaks up the Webley and drops various parts of the weapon into rooftop chimney pots. Terrific stuff.

Pulp Fiction (1994)

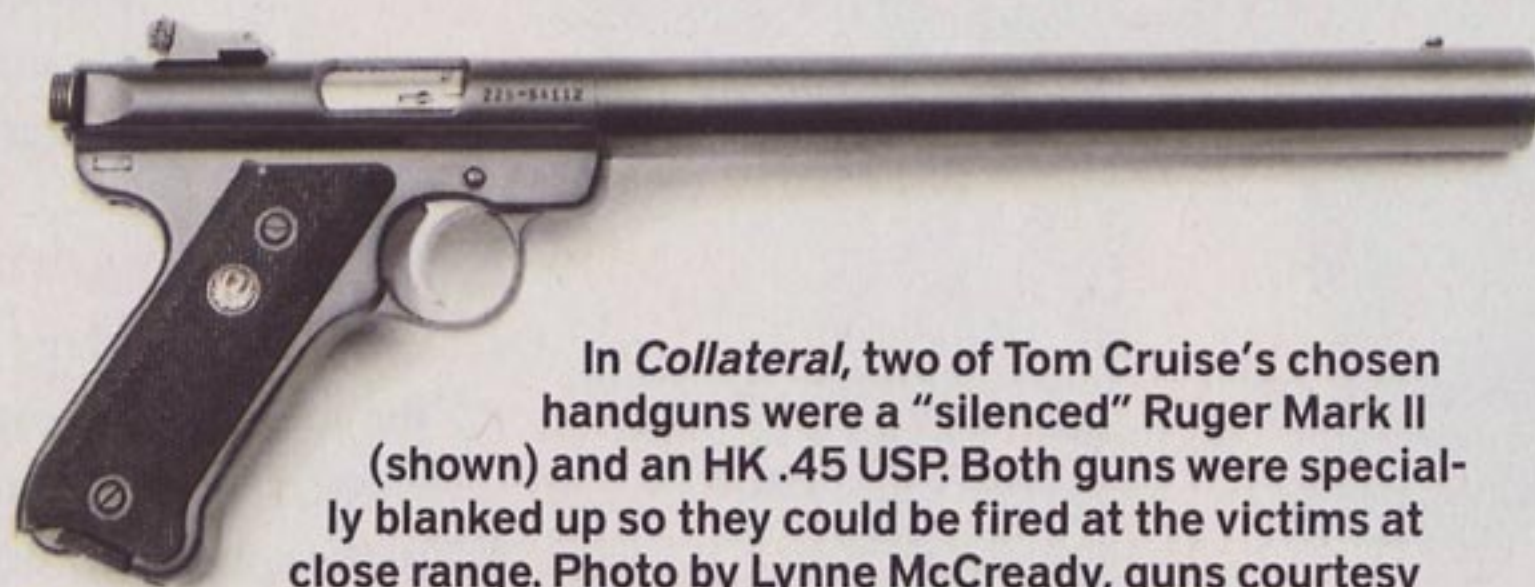
OK, this is not a film for everyone's taste, but there's some interesting, if somewhat fatuous, gun handling in the piece—especially when Vincent Vega's (John Travolta) nick-



Thompson submachine guns, like this Model 1928, figure prominently in *Dillinger*. Frankly, it's hard to imagine a crime movie depicting that period without one. National Firearms Museum



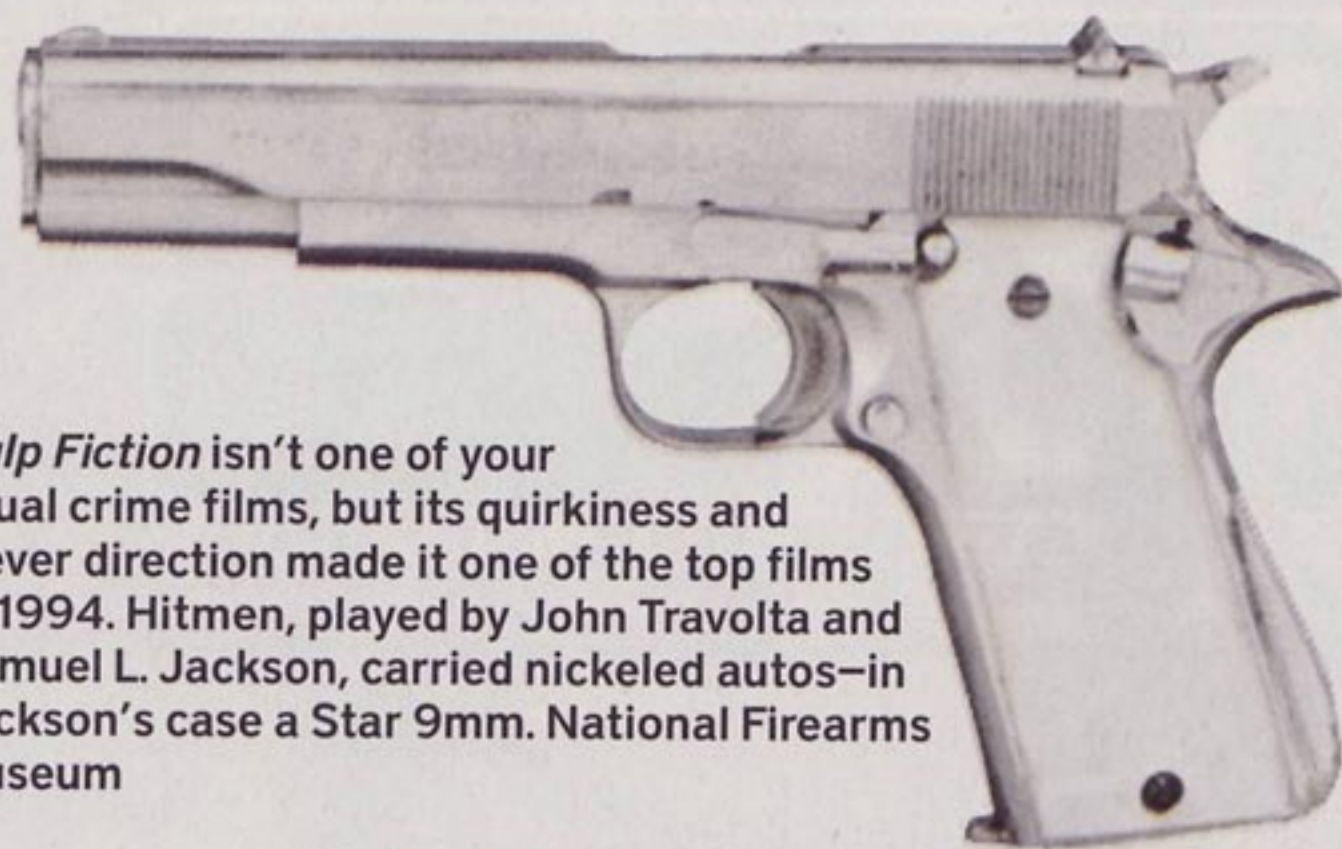
el-plated Auto-Ordnance .45 accidentally goes off, decorating the back seat of the car he's riding in with bits and pieces of a passenger's cranium and the contents thereof. There's also some bravado gun handling by Samuel L. Jackson as Jules Winnfield, who carries a nicked Star 9mm, and Bruce Willis' character, Butch Coolidge, who nails Vega with his own silenced Mac 10. Director/writer Quentin Tarantino does a great editing job, playing with time and motif in the manner of the earlier (1956) brilliant Stanley Kubrick film, *The Killing*—a movie that unfortunately missed this list by two years. There are lots of other interesting gun gymnastics by a



In *Collateral*, two of Tom Cruise's chosen handguns were a "silenced" Ruger Mark II (shown) and an HK .45 USP. Both guns were specially blanked up so they could be fired at the victims at close range. Photo by Lynne McCready, guns courtesy Gibbons Ltd.



Pulp Fiction isn't one of your usual crime films, but its quirkiness and clever direction made it one of the top films of 1994. Hitmen, played by John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson, carried nicked autos—in Jackson's case a Star 9mm. National Firearms Museum



colorful cast of characters. Warning: If you're easily offended, this might not be the movie for you. Also, remember: A McDonald's Quarter-Pounder in France is called a "Royale."



Writer John Milius came up with the idea of arming Harry Callahan with an S&W Model 29 in *Dirty Harry*. This inspired bit of casting melded hero to handgun as never before. In recognition of his efforts, Milius was presented with one of the guns used in the film. National Firearms Museum

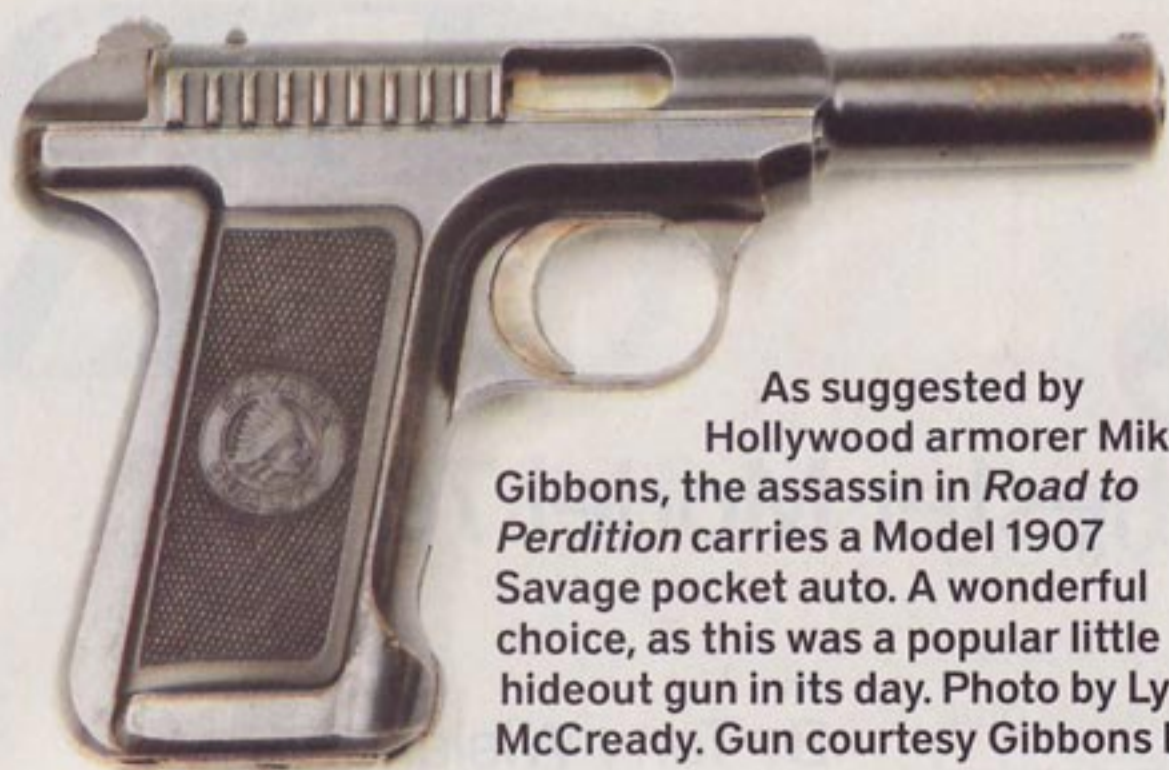
Heat (1995)

Great crime drama by Michael Mann (who's currently in pre-production for *Public Enemies*, a film dealing with many of the Depression-era bandits) based on a 1989 TV movie, also by Mann, called *L.A. Takedown*. It pits introspective robber Neal McCauley (Robert De Niro) against LAPD homicide detective Vincent Hanna (Al Pacino) and includes a bunch of other interesting characters, both nefarious and virtuous. There's all kinds of hardware in the thing, but what the movie is probably best remembered for is the chair-gripping shootout in downtown Los Angeles following a robbery gone sour. You see just about every

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As suggested by Hollywood armorer Mike Gibbons, the assassin in *Road to Perdition* carries a Model 1907 Savage pocket auto. A wonderful choice, as this was a popular little hideout gun in its day. Photo by Lynne McCready. Gun courtesy Gibbons Ltd

kind of full auto extant, with a heavy emphasis on M16 variants, abetted by a smattering of riot guns, Beretta Model 92s and the like. There's also a more modest set-to in a deserted drive-in theatre where gambler/malefactor Chris Shiherlis (Val Kilmer) does his stuff with an HK Model 91. Awesome.

LA Confidential (1997)

I have to admit a particular affinity for this movie, as it depicts early-1950s Los Angeles, a time and place I remember vividly from when I was a kid. I've got to tell you, the details are pretty much spot-on. There are no particularly unusual firearms in the film—riot guns, Detective Specials, M&Ps, Government Models—just the sort of stuff you'd expect police and perps of the period to be brandishing, but that feature alone adds to the interest and verisimilitude of the piece. Shootouts abound, climaxing in one of the best

ever put on film when Det. Lt. Edmund Jennings (Guy Pearce) and Officer Bud White (Russell Crowe) defend themselves in a motel room against a passel of bad cops. Whew! Wouldn't want to have the ammo bill on that one.

Road to Perdition (2002)

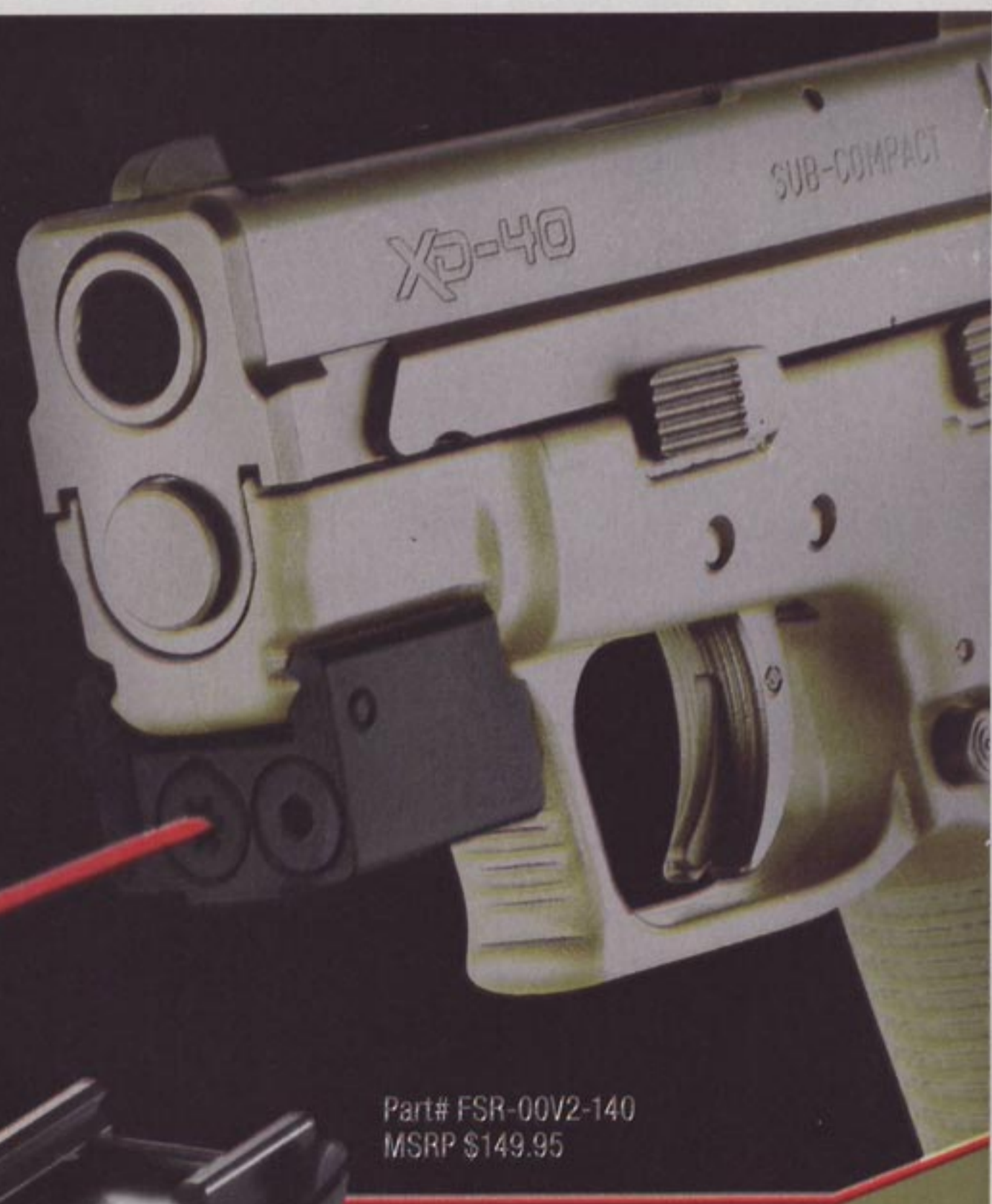
A 1930s-style film noir based on a graphic novel, this movie has style to spare. It involves mob hitman Michael Sullivan (Tom Hanks) and his dealings and double-dealings with the Irish Mafia and Al Capone's boys, among others. As might be expected, Thompsons, Dick Specials and Government Models are very much in evidence, but there is one inspired bit of gun-casting that sets the film above others. As suggested by Mike Gibbons, owner of Gibbons Ltd., a major movie-gun-rental company, crime photographer/part-time assassin Harlen Maguire (Jude Law) carries a Model 1907 Savage pocket auto. I spotted it right off the first time I saw the film and felt it added a great bit of panache to the film. As Mike told me, "I just got tired of seeing the same old guns." Me, too.

Collateral (2004)

This Michael Mann movie has real style. Vincent (Tom Cruise) is a hitman who hires cab driver Max Durocher (Jamie Foxx) to chauffeur him to a quintet of victims. As might be expected, "things happen." The gun handling is certainly sophisticated from a cinematic angle. Nothing fancy here—Vincent carries an HK USP and for specialized work wields a silenced Ruger Mark II .22, but they are used with panache. "Two in the sternum, one in the head"—as fitting a way as I can think of to close this particular article.

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