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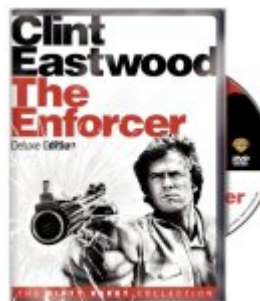
The Enforcer: Deluxe Edition (1976)

[Warner Bros.](#) // R // June 3, 2008

List Price: \$14.98 [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

Review by [Paul Mavis](#) | posted May 30, 2008 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

Desultory Harry. Warner Bros. has released a cleaned-up special edition of the third "Dirty Harry" film, 1976's **The Enforcer**, starring Clint Eastwood and Tyne Daly. Extras include a commentary by the director, James Fargo, and a couple of documentaries (one of which already appeared on the 2000 DVD release). And while there's no indication on the spiffy packaging (a clear slipcover simulates shattered glass over the barrel of Harry's .44) of a new transfer, the image quality is noticeably brighter and cleaner than the 2000 release - although that won't help brighten any viewer's mood after watching this gloomy, minor "Dirty Harry" action flick.



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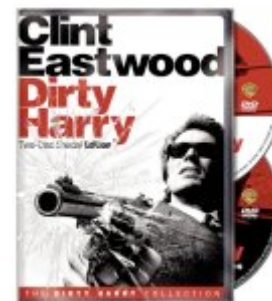
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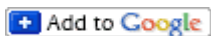


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Inspector Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) is at it again. A militant group, the People's Revolutionary Strike Force (that's PRSF to you), has started a reign of terror in San Francisco, first killing two utility men to get their truck, which is then used in a raid on a weapons warehouse where the revolutionaries load up on guns, ammo, and even anti-tank weapons, for Christ's sake. Harry, Homicide Division's biggest malcontent, is lucky to even be on the case, considering he was just busted to Personnel after driving his car through the window of a liquor store, blowing away the three creeps there who were holding hostages. Having proven to be a total loss during interviews of prospective new inspectors - Harry objects to the mandatory quota of women promoted regardless of their qualifications - Harry is then paired up, naturally, with one of the women he gave a hard time to: recently promoted Inspector Kate Moore (Tyne Daly).

Harry's superior, Captain McKay (Bradford Dillman), okays the team because it will look good with the higher-ups and the mayor (but I thought Harry was an embarrassment....?), and because Harry needs a new partner, since the PRSF killed Harry's old one, Inspector Frank DiGiorgio (John Mitchum) during their warehouse raid. Of course now it's personal for Harry, and through the assistance of a helpful Black Panther-like militant group (that's "Uhuru" to you), Harry is on the hunt for the killer revolutionaries. But look out, Inspector Moore; you know what happens to *all* of Harry's partners....

SPOILERS ALERT!

As a ten-year-old who saw **Dirty Harry** and **Magnum Force** far too many times at the drive-in, I viewed the arrival of 1976's **The Enforcer** as something akin to the Second Coming. Bond and Shaft were cool when I was kid, but Dirty Harry was raw, naked, insane aggression, pure and simple. He loved no one. He didn't seem to even *like* anyone. His joking was grim and charmless. His life, reduced to a series of violent encounters and that's all. He wasn't really even a character, just a "force of nature" with a huge gun, blowing away the creeps and punks who made

life miserable for everybody else (in other words: the perfect embodiment of childish revenge fantasies). So the promise of another installment of Dirty Harry's unfettered mayhem in the service of law and order proved almost too much for my ten-year-old constitution to bear.



And when it was over, in 1976; when the final rocket was launched, I remember feeling distinctly let-down. Disappointed. And today is no different. I haven't watched **The Enforcer** in years (frankly, I've avoided the later "Dirty Harry's" like the plague), but I was eager to see if maybe I was wrong as a kid. That maybe there was something in **The Enforcer** that I had missed entirely. Nope. It still stinks. Oh, there are a few fun parts in **The Enforcer**, a few moments where you think it might take off. But after the blindingly brilliant **Dirty Harry** (a genuine, true work of art), and the crude, base, but effectively hypnotic exploitation of non-artwork **Magnum Force**, **The Enforcer** is ultimately just so much blather and missed opportunities, further debased by muddy cinematography and indifferent, dispirited direction by James Fargo (**Caravans**, **Voyage of the Rock Aliens**). When discussing movies, the term "law of diminishing returns" usually is applied to the increasingly smaller take at the box office for film franchises and sequels. But for the "Dirty Harry" films, it's the inverse; each film made more money than the last (except for the final one), while artistically, the sequels sank further and further into the depths of rote, crass actioners.

I don't mind so much that the story, when it bothers to make sense, is little more than a retread of the two other films in the series. I don't go to a "Dirty Harry" film for story construction. The central premise of the story is the biggest problem, though: why do they bother to team Harry with Kate? Wouldn't that be the *last* thing they'd do, considering how much Captain McKay dislikes Callahan? It's obvious that Harry is given a female partner here because the filmmakers were running out of minorities to get bumped off as Harry's sacrificial lambs. In the first film, DiGiorgio runs down a list of every possible racial group that Harry hates, including whites, and you think for a second it might be true - until Harry gives DiGiorgio a wink

letting us know he doesn't really feel that way at all. So to keep Harry the character "safe" in **The Enforcer**, while still giving him an opportunity to complain and bitch about how the world is screwed up because the police want to promote women who have no experience over officers who truly deserve it (a legitimate beef the movie totally undercuts with no comment when Kate gets her promotion), they give him a female partner, and let him grumble and grouse, until he grudgingly gives his approval of her - which we knew was coming all along. The later "Dirty Harry" movies have pretensions to "being about something" in their subtexts, but they're as predictable - and lame - as an episode of **The Rookies**.

As troubling as the whole Harry/Kate teaming is the film's almost deliberate refusal to examine the revolutionaries (they come off as little more than the cartoon villains in Eastwood's upcoming biker comedies). At one point, we're told they're revolutionaries, fighting for the people. But then someone else says they're in it for the money. But we're never really sure what their motivation is, nor what they ultimately hope to gain with their reign of terror - and if we don't even understand the villains, how do we get up any interest in what Harry's doing? As well, the sudden reversal of "Big Ed" Mustapha (Albert Popwell) from a black separatist who wants to see all the honkies blowing themselves up, to sensitive soul coming to speak with Harry (at a kid's playground, of all places), urging Harry to "do them [the revolutionaries] in," is frankly laughable. Why would Mustapha want Harry to succeed? Wouldn't he be reveling in *anything* that brings down The Man and his law-and-order society? It's such a ridiculous bit of character turnabout (at a crucial point in the story), injected, I would assume, so as not to offend the audience's sensibilities, that it's hard to take anything seriously after it.



Not that anything *before* it was solid, either. The character of Dirty Harry has now become a joke machine, pulling stunts that would get anyone in the real world canned in a San Francisco minute. Which is fine, if you take **The Enforcer** as a spoof or an out-and-out comedy, but at its heart, it really thinks it's a straight actioner. The sequence

of Harry pulling out the fake heart attack scammer from a restaurant is set up like the beginning of an important sequence, but it immediately peters out, coming off as a lame joke showing how "tough" Harry is (with all the people in the restaurant not hip to the scam, exclaiming how cruel he is). Immediately following is the liquor store raid, which is played strictly for laughs (unlike its inspiration - the bank job in **Dirty Harry** - where it's brilliantly kinetic and violent *and* amusing). After Harry gives the punch line about delivering the car, he smashes it through the store window (with no thought of running over hostages inside) and then blasts the baddies, including a big guffaw shot of Harry blowing away a guy from behind, right in the crotch. The topper comes when DiGiorgio lobs tear gas in the store - nonsensically, considering Harry has already prevailed - so Harry can stand there coughing and waving away the smoke. Cue laughs from the audience. Dirty Harry is now Chuckles the Clown. And if that isn't clear enough, the filmmakers seal the deal by getting Harry a bigger and badder "gun" - an anti-tank missile - that you knew the minute you saw it would be used by Harry to blow up the head psycho (the trend would continue in **Sudden Impact** where they give Harry a huge harpoon (!) to fire at somebody). In its own way, the "Dirty Harry" pics were going the way of Bond in the seventies: bigger, more ridiculous, more outsized villains, and more ridiculously oversized weapons. The sick, perverted, complex thrills of the original **Dirty Harry** film, where the viewer didn't know where to turn for safe moral ground, are long gone by the time of **The Enforcer**.

As well, too much of **The Enforcer** feels like "best of" moments from the previous films; in particular, the finale at a big, abandoned location (this time, Alcatraz) where the combatants go through the motions of a cat-and-mouse shoot-out that was wholly predictable by 1976. A lame, drawn-out foot chase through San Francisco (complete with a superfluous, supposedly humorous stop at a porn shoot) wants to be like the scary wild goose chase Harry undergoes for Andy Robinson in the first film, and the tired scenes between Harry and his superior (the totally anonymous Dillman, wasted in a non-role) mimic the better ones with Hal Holbrook in **Magnum Force**, while increasing the yakking quotient big time. For an action film, there sure is a lot of jawing in **The Enforcer**, punctuated occasionally by a relatively inept action scene, while Eastwood alternately walks through the role or stares malevolently, maniacally spitting out his contempt through gritted teeth. I'm a huge fan of Eastwood, but this is not his finest hour, nor is **The Enforcer** a particularly interesting - or even entertaining - action film from his oeuvre.



The DVD:

The Video:

Comparing the **The Enforcer: Deluxe Edition's** anamorphically enhanced, 2.35:1 widescreen transfer to the 2000 DVD edition, it's clear (at least to my eye) that the new transfer is markedly brighter and cleaner, with quite a bit less grain and correctly valued, more saturated colors (skin tones are particularly good here), as well as closer approximation to the original 2.35:1 aspect ratio. Blacks hold, but the cinematography by Charles Short (**The Enforcer** was his first - and only - big screen film) is so crappy that those night scenes are a murky mess (while the rest of the film often looks like it was shot through a dirty window). A big improvement on an already acceptable transfer (the 2000 captures are on the left; the 2008 to the right).



**The Audio:**

I'm assuming the 2000 Dolby Digital Surround 5.1 remix from the original mono is the same used here, which is fine because it's excellent. Directionality is wide and nicely balanced, while the bass levels are appropriately robust during those fantastic "Ka-BOOMS" of Harry's .44 Magnum. In addition, French, Japanese, Spanish and Portuguese mono tracks and subtitles are available.

The Extras:

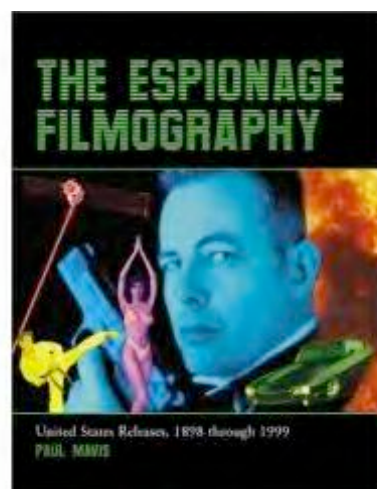
Harry Callahan/Clint Eastwood: Something Special in Films, running 6:00, already appeared on the 2000 release. It's a vintage doc produced for publicity during the 1976

theatrical run, with its main interest lying in seeing some behind-the-scenes goings-on of the film being shot on location in San Francisco. Newly produced for this DVD release, *The Business End: Violence in Cinema*, running 30:00, features filmmakers, actors and commentators like Jay Cocks, Andy Robinson, Neal King, Hal Holbrook, and quite a few others trying to get to the bottom of a basic question: is movie violence harmful or not. And their conclusions are the same varied, inconclusive, mutually exclusive jerking off debates you've had a million times already with your friends when discussing the latest spate of carnage at your local movie house. If you have a take on movie violence, you'll hear it expressed here. A "Dirty Harry" trailer gallery is included. There's also an entertaining feature-length commentary track by director James Fargo which pretty much confirmed my feelings about the film (at the end, he claims that if you don't have "fun" making a movie, it shows in the film, and it "becomes depressing." And then he states he had a lot of fun making **The Enforcer**. The old axiom I remember from countless statements by directors and actors is that one should beware the production where everybody had a ball: a bad film usually results. Case in point: **The Enforcer**.






Final Thoughts:

Misguided from its inception, and distressingly slow and talky, **The Enforcer** doesn't have a lot going for it, with only a few, very brief flashes of the drive and perverse charges of **Dirty Harry** and **Magnum Force**. This deluxe edition *does* deliver a much improved transfer, along with two new extras for fans of this "Dirty Harry" entry. Those fans will want to upgrade to this attractive disc, but everyone else will, at best, get by with a rental (and only if you're a "Dirty Harry" completist).

Paul Mavis is an internationally published film and television historian, a member of the [Online Film Critics Society](#), and the author of [The Espionage Filmography](#).



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