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Dirty Harry - Ultimate Collector's Edition (Blu-ray)

Picture/Sound/Extras: B+/Films:

- Dirty Harry** (1971) B+/B-/A-
- Magnum Force** (1973) B/C+/B
- The Enforcer** (1976) B/C+/B
- Sudden Impact** (1983) B/B-/C
- The Dead Pool** (1988) B/B-/C-



Before the word franchise was bounced around as a way to cover for the bankruptcy of doing sequels all the time, as if that were a good thing, sequels were made with caution because ruining the reputation of the original was considered a bad thing and bad business.

Now, repetition, more for worse than better, is too often the business. The audience also used to expect more and sometimes, doing a sequel or series made sense. Of course, long before there was TV of any kind, the studios made series with a featured character, most often of which were Mystery/Detective films. Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry films revived that by accident and took the same course of many of those series.

You start with a really string film, find a way to do some follow-ups and either later in the series, and/or in later years, lesser follow-ups are produced and sometimes even do business. Originally intended as a project for Frank Sinatra and even John Wayne, the first **Dirty Harry** (1971) originally had directors as savvy as Irvin Kershner attached, but Eastwood got the lead and the late, great Don Siegel took the helm resulting in a huge, controversial hit film.

Inspired by the then-unresolved Zodiac killings of the time, Lt. Dirty Harry Callahan is called in when a young lady is shot to death while swimming in a penthouse pool. A chilling note is attached with threats of more killings, the major and Callahan's boss meet and it is established that there is not a consensus on how to deal with this new kind of killer, everyone has the best of intents and Harry is one of the greatest loose guns in cinema history. Especially because of the type of killer Scorpio is, the line is challenged between Civil Rights, standard police procedure and how to stop the killer.

One of the most imitated films ever made, the screenplay by Harry Julian Fink, R.M. Fink and Dean Riesner (with uncredited additions by John

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Milius) was a revelation in the middle of the counterculture period, Vietnam, the last Golden Age of Hollywood and a great updating of the hardcore gumshoe detective. John Vernon was perfect as the mayor, Andrew Robinson unforgettable as the killer and Eastwood began his long run as one of the world's top box office stars by finally conquering his own homeland box office. The classic holds up very well, has even appreciated in some respects and as was recently pointed out, was a movie from a time when movies were still movies.

With success comes criticism and many on the political Left (and far Left) accused the film of being reactionary, even fascist, without addressing its content in any way, shape or form. Part of this stemmed from Milius' contributions, so Eastwood brought him back with Michael Cimino, who wrote and directed the underrated Eastwood hit **Thunderbolt & Lightfoot** the same year (and would go on to make important films like **The Deer Hunter**, **Heaven's Gate** and **Year Of The Dragon**) to co-write **Magnum Force** (1973) in which Harry has to deal with corruption within the police department. The Left Wing critics did not know what to say to that, the film was a hit and satisfied the public's desire to see the character return.

Though the film can be uneven in parts and does not take advantage of being a follow-up as much as I would have liked, I found a new appreciation here for it thanks to the High Def playback and nuances I had not considered, not having seen it in a long time. The underrated director Ted Post came from TV and made **Hang 'Em High** with Eastwood back in 1968, but also helmed the underrated **Beneath The Planet Of The Apes** (1970) and does some solid work here. Hal Holbrook, David Soul, Robert Urich, David Soul, Kip Niven, Margaret Avery and an uncredited Suzanne Somers also star.

These first two films were shot in 35mm anamorphic Panavision and produced in three-strip dye-transfer Technicolor prints, presented here in 1080p 2.35 X 1 digital High Definition. The original film looks really good for its age and is actually the best-looking transfer here in color, depth, film-like appearance and despite some flaws, is very clean for its age. Director of Photography Bruce Surtees lensed this and his first three films (including this, **The Beguiled** and **Play Misty For Me**) are his first works, all great films. Director of Photography Frank Stanley lensed Force and was the next talent to handle the camera with Eastwood, also handling the same chores on **Thunderbolt & Lightfoot**. It does not look as good or colorful or consistent as the first film, but still has its moments.

Eastwood friend and longtime assistant director James Fargo took on **The Enforcer** (1976) as his debut feature film and the result is the biggest surprise in the series as a gang of Vietnam-vets-turned-terrorists threaten the city of San Francisco while Harry is paired with a female officer (Tyne Daly) in an odd couple arrangement neither of them like. However, the energy, pace, wit and action of the screenplay by the great Stirling Silliphant and a returning Dean Riesner (based on the Gail Morgan Hickman/S.W. Schurr story) is impressive and has also influenced many a film, including the original Robocop in 1987, but it also sports fine performances by the leads, Bradford Dillman, DeVeren Bookwalter, the cast in general and yes, that is Rob Reiner in a chase scene.

Unfortunately, Harry's luck began to run out with **Sudden Impact** in 1983 and not because Eastwood directed, but because the story of a rape victim (Sandra Locke) out for revenge never adds up and seems more trivial than ever has not dated well. The breakup of the star/director and his leading lady makes it odder, but this film lacks the depth, action, energy and pace of its predecessors and though a hit in the reactionary 1980s, many felt the gun (and its lighting) stole many of the scenes. Even worse is Buddy Van Horn, Eastwood's stunt director turned film director, helming **The Dead Pool** in 1988. Harry is on a list of those

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marked for death by another psychopath and has to stop him before it is too late.

It was a disappointment critically and commercially, as Van Horn was killing Eastwood's career much the way Hal Needham (another stunt expert turned director) did for Eastwood pier Burt Reynolds. The film was so comic and problematic that I dubbed it "*Clean Harry*". Rumors of a sixth film have been squashed by Eastwood and rightly so. The series ran out of steam after 1976, after all.

The 1080p 2.35 X 1 digital High Definition image in both cases here had less complex color prints, but still look good, if a little softer than expected. Charles W. Short lensed **The Enforcer** to great effect and delivered many memorable scenes, while Surtees was back for **Impact**, at least trying to give the film a different look, even if it did not always work. **Dead Pool** was in a VHS-safe 1.85 X 1 frame here in soft 1080p high Def and is from an old Warner Communications print, though not the nightmare the HD-DVD and Blu-ray is for Harry imitator **Lethal Weapon 1**. Jack N. Green, now Eastwood's cinematographer all this time later, shot this, but it is only intermittently interesting like the silly film itself. Not his best work.

All five films are here at their best in Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mixes, with music by Lalo Schiffrin in all cases except **The Enforcer**, but the late, great Jerry Fielding. All the films are originally monophonic except the last, as **Dead Pool** arrived in Dolby System Stereo A-type analog audio. Some more work could be done all around, though the original film had been around for a while in a stereo remix from years ago by the Chace Labs. Dialogue and sound effects show their age, but this is better than flat out mono, but still, I have my misgivings throughout all five of the new mixes.

All five films have new special features and trailers for all five films. The original films has a new feature length audio commentary by filmmaker/Eastwood associate/biographer Richard Schickel, new *Long Shadow of Dirty Harry* featurette, *Dirty Harry: The Original* featurette, vintage Dirty Harry's Way promo short, interview gallery, with Patricia Clarkson, Joel Cox, Clint Eastwood, Hal Holbrook, Evan Kim, John Milius, Ted Post, Andy Robinson, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Robert Urich and 1993 *Clint Eastwood: The Man from Malpaso* TV special.

Magnum Force offers a new feature length audio commentary by screenwriter John Milius, new featurette *A Moral Right: The Politics of Dirty Harry* and featurette *The Hero Cop: Yesterday and Today*. **The Enforcer** offers a new feature length audio commentary by The Enforcer's director James Fargo, new featurettes *The Business End: Violence in Cinema* and *Harry Callahan/Clint Eastwood: Something Special in Films*. **Sudden Impact** has new feature length audio commentary by filmmaker and Eastwood associate/biographer Richard Schickel and new featurette *The Evolution of Clint Eastwood*. **The Dead Pool** rounds things out with a new feature length audio commentary by Producer David Valdes & cinematographer Green and a new Featurette *The Craft of Dirty Harry*.

This box adds a 40+ page hardcover book, a person note from Eastwood on the series, wallet with metal badge and removable ID card, five 5" x 7" lobby poster reproduction cards and an exclusive Ultimate Collector's Edition card, *Scorpio: Portrait of a Killer* 19" x 27" map of San Francisco detailing Harry's hunt for the killer in the first film and never-before-seen production correspondence.

The feature-length documentary **Clint Eastwood: Out of the Shadows** was also to be included here in a bonus disc, but that may only be for the DVD version, which we did not receive. However, this is a good set worth

getting of the first three films and is sure to be popular.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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