

**TOUCH OF EVIL**  
**Directed by Orson Welles**  
USA 1958, 110 mins, Cert 12A  
A BFI Release  
1998 version (newly remastered)

Starring Orson Welles, Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh



**Opening on 10 July 2015 at BFI Southbank and selected cinemas  
UK-wide including Picturehouse, Cineworld and Vue sites**

Celebrating the centenary of Orson Welles (1915–1985), the BFI will re-release his last Hollywood feature, the deliciously dark and sleazy *Touch of Evil*, in selected cinemas UK-wide. Welles' *noir* masterpiece will also form the centrepiece of a major retrospective season, *Orson Welles: The Great Disruptor*, to be presented at BFI Southbank between 1 July and 31 August. The BFI will re-release *Touch of Evil* in the 1998 re-edit by Oscar-winning film editor and sound designer **Walter Murch**, newly remastered in 2013.

In a seedy US-Mexican border town, detective Miguel Vargas (**Charlton Heston**) and his newly wed wife Susie (**Janet Leigh**) become embroiled in a deadly maelstrom of crime and corruption as Miguel's investigations into a narcotics ring bring him into conflict with local law-enforcer Hank Quinlan (**Orson Welles**). A ferocious battle of wits ensues ...

A virtuoso foray into *film noir*, *Touch of Evil* exhibits Welles' extraordinary sense of cinematic style, his gift for vivid characterisation and almost Shakespearian flair for tragedy. In 2013 *The Guardian* and *Observer's* critics named it the second-best crime film ever made and the third-best *film noir*. Its influence has spanned decades, encompassing the work of French New Wave directors such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, and discernible in more recent films such

as *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson) and *Lone Star* (John Sayles). Today its fans include such filmmaking luminaries as the Coen brothers, Jim Jarmusch, Wes Anderson and George Lucas.

*Touch of Evil* began life as a mid-budget crime thriller based on the novel *Badge of Evil* by Whit Masterson. Charlton Heston once revealed that when he was approached to take part, no director had as yet been attached to the project. On hearing that Orson Welles had agreed to play the heavy, he made a daring suggestion: "Why don't you have him direct it? He's a pretty good director you know ..." Welles agreed to the proposal on condition that he be allowed to re-write the script.

Alongside the star cast and co-stars **Joseph Calleia** and **Akim Tamiroff**, *Touch of Evil* features a minor but mesmerising performance by guest star **Marlene Dietrich** as a gypsy fortune-teller and **Zsa Zsa Gabor** in the role of a strip-joint owner. A young **Dennis Weaver** plays the creepy night manager of a motel.

After Welles had completed principal photography and edited the first cut, *Touch of Evil* was viewed by Universal who felt that it could be improved. Taking the film away from Welles, the studio re-edited the film and shot some additional scenes. Within hours of seeing this new version Welles wrote an impassioned 58-page memo requesting editorial changes, which were mostly ignored.

The aim of Walter Murch and Rick Schmidlin's 1998 cut, on which Welles expert and critic Jonathan Rosenbaum acted as consultant, was to bring the film as close as possible to Welles' original vision. One of their most significant changes was the removal of titles superimposed on the famous opening scene – the magnificent 3-minute-20-second tracking shot of a moving car – allowing it to play as a straight piece of dramatic action. They also replaced Henry Mancini's title music with a montage of the kind of source music – rock and roll and Latin jazz – with which Welles hoped to evoke the atmosphere of busy street life in a border town.

For many critics, *Touch of Evil* rivals *Citizen Kane* as Welles' masterpiece – bold, innovative and ahead of its time. Indeed, back in 1996, Peter Wollen commented in *Sight & Sound* on 'how amazingly alive and topical it still seems in its treatment of the Mexican-American border, and of racism and police corruption'. Today – almost 20 years later (and nearly 60 years after it was made), it remains as vital and gripping as ever.

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More details on this film and the cinemas showing it are at

[www.bfi.org.uk/releases](http://www.bfi.org.uk/releases)

**#AwesomeWelles** [www.bfi.org.uk/orsonwelles](http://www.bfi.org.uk/orsonwelles)

**Notes to editors**

- *Touch of Evil* is re-released in selected cinemas UK-wide on 10 July by the BFI, courtesy of Universal Pictures International.
- The retrospective season, *Orson Welles: The Great Disruptor* runs at BFI Southbank from 1 July to 31 August.

8 May 2015