



**DREAM PALACE**

# The Warriors

*Introduced by director Asif Kapadia (Monday 21 June screening only).*

‘What I like to do is put interesting characters in tough situations and force them to make choices about conduct,’ Walter Hill says. The statement recalls Hemingway, one of his favourite writers: ‘I admire Hemingway’s early stuff enormously. When I was a kid I read *The Fifth Column* and *The First Forty-Nine Stories*. They were punctuated by little word pictures, incidents done in paragraphs, reportorial things about Greece and Africa and the First World War. Hemingway had a sound dramatic theory that also wasn’t a bad idea of how to conduct a life. I know he became a kind of whipping boy, but listen, the mice around the cathedral are always complaining.’

After *Hard Times* (1975), *The Driver* (1978), *The Warriors* (1979), *The Long Riders* (1980) and *Southern Comfort* (1981), Walter Hill is in the same position in the American cinema that Hemingway occupied in American literature before *The Sun Also Rises*. He is a controversial director but also a director’s director (just as Hemingway was a writer’s writer), better known to other filmmakers and to critics than to a general audience. His best fictions, like many of Hemingway’s, are action stories, transformed by acute observation and craft into stirring moral fables. He reworks such ‘dated’ themes as courage and honour, and living up to one’s code during times of crisis. He may be out of synch in an era when most prestigious film dramas are what Hill would call ‘rug movies – you know, the kind where everyone stands around talking, on a rug.’

Hill’s emphasis on integrity helps him find his way through morally complicated subcultures, whether that of the Jesse James gang in *The Long Riders* or of contemporary street gangs in *The Warriors*. ‘My films are both real and unreal,’ he says. ‘You’ve got to create a context in which stark moral decisions make sense.’ In the first film Hill directed, *Hard Times* (*The Streetfighter*, UK), that context is Depression New Orleans, where his drifter hero, Chaney (Charles Bronson), takes up the dangerous high-stakes sport of bare-knuckled streetfighting. When Chaney’s woman asks what he does for a living, he says, ‘I knock people down.’ But Chaney is generous as well as brutal and transcends his circumstances. Like many of Hill’s heroes, he is a man with a strong sense of self and enough fellow-feeling to keep from being merely selfish.

One of the few major American directors of his generation who never went to film school, Hill studied history and literature, took a Master’s in English and toyed with the idea of journalism. His first movie job was writing the sort of ‘educational’ films that used to be shown in high school history and civics classes, what he calls ‘docu-dramas before their time’. But Hill soon realised that if he wanted to accomplish anything substantial in the movies he had better become a director. He joined the Directors Guild of America assistant director training programme shortly after it started in 1964 and worked as a second AD for some two years. Though this prepared him for working on a movie set, it was not as effective a stepping stone to directing as writing saleable scripts. As soon as he’d sold an ‘original’, Hill became a full-time screenwriter.

John Milius, Terrence Malick, Walter Hill and Hill's long-time producing-writing partner David Giler were among a group of young writers employed by Warner Bros in the late 60s and early 70s. Hill is not particularly proud of his Warners films, which included *Hickey and Boggs* and *The Thief Who Came to Dinner*. In 1971, however, he wrote *The Getaway* for First Artists and National General Pictures. Directed by Sam Peckinpah, this script was the first to come out as Hill wanted; it was a commercial milestone and to Hill's mind an artistic one too.

Over three years later, Hill got his chance to direct. Producer Lawrence Gordon, knowing that Hill had written an unproduced script concerning fist-fighting, called him in to rewrite and then direct *Hard Times*. This critical and financial success led Gordon to produce a Hill original, *The Driver*, perhaps the most abstract movie ever made in Hollywood.

*The Driver* made millions overseas, but Hill didn't have the blockbuster success that could have earned him the independence of a Lucas or a Coppola. In 1978, when a deal to make Hill's favourite original script (a Western called *The Last Gun*) fell through, Lawrence Gordon offered him the chance to make *The Warriors*. Hill accepted, though it meant filming a difficult subject in almost impossible circumstances. Hill rewrote the David Shaber script of Sol Yurick's novel, an update of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, replacing Greeks marching through Persia with a Coney Island street gang racing through enemy boroughs of Manhattan. In the meantime, Gordon and Paramount realised that at least four other teen gang movies were already in the works. Hill signed on to *The Warriors* late in the spring; he had to start shooting in June, and bring the film into the theatres on 9 February 1979, ahead of all the other gang movies. Hill not only beat the deadline, he put his stamp on the project from the start. 'To keep it from becoming ridiculous,' Hill says, 'this thing had to be done absolutely full-stop. We stripped these kids' lives down to their peer groups, then blew them all up again in comic book style. This was comic book, rock 'n' roll Xenophon. That was the way to get people to see these kids as warriors.'

Hill never expected the outcome. The media linked three or more teen killings to screenings of the film. 'We were suddenly the most talked about movie in the country,' Hill says. 'We thought we'd be the most obscure movie in the country.' Paramount Pictures tried to push the film back into obscurity, pulling TV and print ads. Hill took a savaging from many critics. The film was even called racist, though Hill had gone out of his way to make it non-racist: the Warriors themselves became a wildly improbable mix of blacks, whites and Hispanics. 'What people don't realise is that when you do something like *The Warriors*, even though the characters are two-dimensional they still have to have complete integrity in the two-dimensional sense. Each character has to be totally consistent, so anything odd he does will make a point. When a tough guy gives a girl a flower, it should kill you.'

Despite Paramount's jitters, *The Warriors*, with the help of Pauline Kael and a few other key critics, put Hill in the pulp avant-garde and proved to be his biggest financial success as a director to date. Even before working on *The Warriors*, though, Hill moved to consolidate his box-office standing and gain more autonomy in the industry by working on *Alien*, a frankly commercial project. When Hill read the original script by Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett, he decided that it could be 'a science fiction version of *Jaws*'. His tough spare rewrite sold the film to Twentieth Century-Fox and director Ridley Scott. David Giler co-wrote the final draft and oversaw the production

in England; Hill helped cast the film, and chipped in on post-production chores after finishing *The Warriors*. *Alien* was a sizable hit, ranking fourth on *Variety*'s list of 1979 box-office champions. But after Writers' Guild arbitrations Hill and Giler only got credit as production executives. Their hit instinct did not prove to be enough to put them in the catbird seat for big commercial movies.

## Michael Sragow, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 1982

### THE WARRIORS

*Director:* Walter Hill  
*©/Production Company:* Paramount Pictures Corporation  
*Producer:* Lawrence Gordon  
*Associate Producer:* Joel Silver  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Gail Geibel  
*Production Manager:* John Starke  
*Location Co-ordinators:* Alex Ho, David Streit  
*Assistant Directors:* David O. Sosna, Bob Barth, Peter Gries  
*Screenplay:* David Shaber, Walter Hill  
*Original Novel:* Sol Yurick  
*Director of Photography:* Andrew Laszlo  
*Special Effects:* Edward Drohan  
*Editors:* David Holden, Freeman Davies Jr, Billy Weber, Susan E. Morse  
*Assistant Editor:* Lisa Churgin  
*Art Directors:* Don Swanagan, Bob Wightman  
*Set Decorator:* Fred Weiler  
*Scenic Artist:* William Lucek  
*Costumes:* Bobbie Mannix, Mary Ellen Winston  
*Make-up:* Mike Maggi  
*Title Design:* Dan Perri  
*Opticals:* Modern Film Effects  
*Music:* Barry DeVorzon  
*Additional Music Arrangers:* Rob Mounsey, Paul Griffin  
*Additional Music Supervisor:* Kenny Vance  
*Additional Music Co-supervisor:* Joe Ferla  
*Sound Recording:* Jack Jacobsen, Al Mian  
*Sound Re-recording:* Tex Rudloff, Don Mitchell, Richard Kline  
*Supervising Sound Effects Editor:* Howard Beals  
*Sound Effects:* George Watters II, Allan Murry, William Andrews, Lee Osborne  
*Stunt Arranger:* Craig R. Baxley

### Cast

Michael Beck (*Swan*)  
James Remar (*Ajax*)  
Thomas Waites (*Fox*)  
Dorsey Wright (*Cleon*)  
Brian Tyler (*Snow*)  
David Harris (*Cochise*)  
Tom McKitterick (*Cowboy*)  
Marcelino Sanchez (*Rembrandt*)

Terry Michos (*Vermin*)  
Deborah Van Valkenburgh (*Mercy*)  
Roger Hill (*Cyrus*)  
David Patrick Kelly (*Luther*)  
Lynne Thigpen (*DJ*)  
Ginny Ortiz (*candy store girl*)  
Mercedes Ruehl (*policewoman*)  
John Snyder (*gas station man*)  
Dennis Gregory (*Masai*)  
Gwynn Press, Jodi Price, Jeffrey Scott, Carl Brown (*prom couples*)  
Edward Sewer, Ron Ferrell, Fernando Castillo, Hubert Edwards, Larry Sears, Mike James, Gregory Cleghorne, George Lee Miles, Gerald G. Francis, Benny Harding, Eddie Prather, Kevin Stockton (*Gramercy Riffs*)  
Joel Weiss, Harold Miller, Dan Bonnell, Dan Battles, Tom Jarus, Michael Garfield, Chris Harley, Mark Baltazar (*Rogues*)  
J.W. Smith, Cal Saint John, Joe Zimmardi, Carrotte, William Williams, Marvin Foster, Johnny Barnes, Ken Thret, Michael Jeffrey (*Turnbull A.C.s*)  
Paul Greco, Apache Ramos, Tony Michael Pann, Neal Gold, James Margolin, Chuck Mason, Andy Engel, Ian Cohen, Charles Serrano, Charles Doolan (*Orphans*)  
Jery Hewitt, Rob Ryder, Steve Chambers, Richard Chiotti, Tony Latham, Eugene Bicknell, T.J. McNamara, Steven James, Lane Ruoff, Harry Madsen, William Anagnos, John Gibson (*Baseball Furies*)  
Lisa Maurer, Kate Klugman, Wanda Velez, Dee Dee Benrey, Jordan Cae Harrell, Donna Ritchie, Doran Clark, Patty Brown, Iris Alahanti, Victoria Vanderkloot, Laura De Lano, Suki Rothchild, Heidi Lynch (*Lizzies*)  
Craig R. Baxley, A.J. Bakunas, Gary Baxley, Konrad Sheehan, Eddie Earl Hatch, Thomas Huff, Leon Delaney (*Punks*)  
Irwin Keyes, Larry Silvestri, Sonny Landham, Frank Ferrara, Pat Flannery, Leo Ciani, Charlie McCarthy, Tony Clark, Victor Magnotta (*police*)

USA 1979©  
93 mins

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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