



RE-RELEASES

Croupier

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

To see *Croupier* as more writer Paul Mayersberg's work than director Mike Hodges' is a powerful temptation. But as *Get Carter* reminds us (looking on reissue like a cross between *Alfie*, 1966, and *Bande à part*, 1964), Hodges is unfailingly professional in matching style to story. He sets up the context for his players with a discretion verging on anonymity and then, on a whim, takes time out for a striking detail (for example, in 1974's *The Terminal Man*, the silent invasion of white floor-tiles by bloodied water). Even so, given his special fluency with long shots, the confines of *Croupier* have cramped Hodges considerably: this is a basement-flat London, briefly glimpsed between forests of mirrors.

Reflections are integral to Mayersberg's scenario, as might be expected after the emphatic self-regarding theme of his *Eureka* script. Hodges' contribution is to fashion the casino as a glass cage of distortions, the eye constantly deceived by misshapen figures and rippled furniture, as unreliable as the occupants. Otherwise, he captures with a merciless accuracy the bedsit decor, the cramped kitchens and sparse sitting rooms, tiny arenas of emotional combat. Even when the scene shifts to a country mansion, the sense of entrapment is maintained, and the camera lingers on a copy of Gericault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa* in recognition of a similar predicament: despair, madness and an intolerable intimacy unite the drifting group of the near-dead. Where Hodges and Mayersberg also seem well attuned is in the isolation of their wheel-spinner, a recognisable fusion of the two Jacks – Carter and McCann from *Eureka* – who fell to earth in their separate ways. The croupier particularly resembles *Eureka*'s lost plutocrat in finding his plot of gold, a best-seller, and freezing into satisfied inaction. In fact, Mayersberg's reported starting point for *Croupier* was Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), in which two peasants share a befuddled panic on the edges of a tumultuous history far beyond their comprehension.

In *Get Carter* the ruthless hitman uncovers a malevolent network for whom his personal vendetta is insignificant. Similarly in *Croupier* the dealer is not so much crushed as anaesthetised when he learns he's simply been a card in somebody else's winning hand all along. His compensation, apart from a slightly dodgy new girlfriend, is the daily opportunity to indulge in the joyful exercise of numbers, a hobby lifted directly from the father-daughter relationship in *Eureka*. His 'mission' accomplished, he hails himself master of the game with the power 'to make you lose'. This dubious accomplishment is neatly celebrated by sweeping the camera (us), along with a pile of gambling chips, down a conclusive black hole.

Part of the intricacy of *Croupier* (very Mayersbergian) lies in the intermingling of 'fiction' and 'reality', portions of the story being disguised as the croupier's novel. Since all the characters are living their own fictions anyway, the flatly rendered dialogue, spoken as if quoting a text, adds to the sense of a writer shuffling phrases and episodes until he finds the most suitable. At one point the on-screen Jack even corrects the off-screen Jake, who has been chipping in throughout the film with information and opinion. Such ironies aside, and

despite earnest performances by all concerned, *Croupier* is an absorbing rather than an appealing exercise. As the croupier's partner observes on first reading: 'There's no hope in it.' But the misanthropist is dismissive: 'It's the truth,' he says.

Philip Strick, *Sight & Sound*, July 1999

Paul Mayersberg: 'The origin of the film is a curious one. I had for many years tried to write a film about a gambler who plans a raid on a casino, but on the night of the robbery, he breaks the bank himself and so there is no money to steal. I could never quite make it work as the story was an anti-climax. I decided to look at it from another angle – to tell a story where fate intervenes to ruin the plans but good comes of it. If you gamble, you are aware of winning and losing streaks. I wanted to write a story where the two came together. In the original there was a character who never spoke, he was just an observer – the croupier. I decided to tell his story. I switched everything around and the croupier became the hero, the minor character became central and the gambler disappeared.

'I was inspired by Kurosawa's samurai story *The Hidden Fortress*, in which the lead characters are hangers-on. In Japan, many attitudes are the complete reversal of the European. I took what I thought was a Japanese view of the story. I just kept the essence of the original ironic tale.'

Jonathan Cavendish of Little Bird was approached by Channel Four's David Aukin to produce the film: 'The script immediately appealed to me. It is a very modern story with contemporary ideas, but told in a very classic manner. The first task was to find the right director. Both David and Paul had known Mike Hodges for years and I am a great fan of many of his films.

'The three of us all wanted to work with him, which was a happy coincidence. Mike is very good on atmosphere. The script was very intense and had a compelling quality which draws you into the story and Mike is able to do the same cinematically. I think all Mike's films have a theme: an individual within or against the system; but in this case, the individual realises where he belongs.'

Much of Mike Hodges' early documentary work for *World in Action* depended on observing life within organisations from Mobil Oil to the US presidential elections. He explains the project's appeal: 'The story seemed relevant to the times we live in and had a complicated psychology. I was intrigued by the role of the croupier. It sounds like a romantic job and conjures up thoughts and images, but in fact it's a very curious job. It's not very well paid and croupiers have an ambivalent relationship with both the people who run the casino (and make vast sums of money), and the punters – the people who spend the money.

'The casino becomes a metaphor for life and Jack is like a scientist observing human behaviour close-up. I have that in common with the character – as I watch people's behaviour very acutely. The casino struck me as a bell jar where it's possible to examine human frailty and foolishness and to either sympathise with it or to despise it. Jack treads a fine line between the two.'

Clive Owen was cast as the central character, Jack Manfred. 'Clive is extraordinary, he's the most precise actor I've worked with since Michael Caine. He also has an extensive knowledge of filmmaking and its rhythms. I think he is ideally cast,' says Hodges.

Owen explains what attracted him to the part: 'I liked the emotional world underneath the surface of the script, which is not immediately apparent. It's

very economically written with quite a simple story line, the casino is an analogy for something bigger. The voiceover is the film for me. Without that it would be too elusive. Jack has a conversation with the audience throughout. Part of my decision was also Mike's involvement; he's a joy to work with, he's very experienced which is very important when you're making such a complex film.

Paul Mayersberg researched the subject by talking to croupiers to get the correct procedure: 'A lot of the detail of the film has been supervised by experts in different departments. The psychology came from talking to croupiers. The most important aspect seemed to be how tedious the job is. The people who do it are attracted initially by the possibility of promotion and travel, but the price you pay is to be psychologically undermined. It's just like boarding school with its hierarchy, prefects and rules.

'I am resolutely not a gambler. It's seductive and undermines your life. I was interested to look at gambling from the point of view of a man who can't lose. He has contempt for gamblers and his kick is watching them lose. As a croupier, Jack's not typical because he refuses to gamble. His gamble is the writing connection. Writers all believe that, against the odds, they are going to be published and successful.'

Mayersberg explains why the film is relevant to all of us: 'The world of the casino is divided into gamblers and croupiers. The gamblers take risks and the croupiers have no risk at all; the odds are always in favour of the casino. We have a choice in life between working in the casino or the risk-taking of being a gambler. The question arises: do you want a life of security or a life of risk? The answer is: we want both.'

Production notes

CROUPIER

Directed by: Mike Hodges
©: Little Bird Company Limited, TATfilm,
La Compagnie des Phares et Balises, La Sept Cinéma, Channel Four
Television Corporation
A Little Bird production: Little Bird Company Limited
A TATfilm production
In Association with: La Compagnie des Phares et Balises
Presented by: Film Four International
In association with: Filmstiftung NRW, WDR - Westdeutscher
Rundfunk, La Sept Cinéma, ARTE, Canal+
Presented by: Channel Four Films
Executive Producer: James Mitchell
Producer: Jonathan Cavendish
Co-producer: Christine Ruppert
Line Producer: Jake Lloyd
Associate Producer: Martin Wiebel
Production Manager (Germany): Bernd Huckenbeck
Production Manager (UK): Julie Clark
South Location Manager (UK Unit): Mark Shorrock
Unit Location Manager (German Unit): Gabriele Goiczky
Locations (German Unit): Frank Meter
Post-production Supervisor (UK Unit): Daniel Lloyd
1st Assistant Director: Michael Murray
Continuity: Catherine Allinson
Script Associate: Nicky Ryde
Casting Director: Leo Davis
Written by: Paul Mayersberg
Director of Photography: Mike Garfath
Camera Operator: Gordon Hayman
Editor: Les Healey
Production Designer: Jon Bunker
Art Director: Ian Reade Hill
Art Director (German Unit): Alexander Scherer
Production Buyer/Set Decorator: Gillie Delap
Prop Buyer/Set Decorator (German Unit): Gernot Thöndel
Costume Designer: Caroline Harris
Wardrobe Supervisor: Nicholas Heather
Wardrobe: Anja Bölick
German Unit Wardrobe: Ursula Münstermann
Make-up Artist: Horst Allert, Delia Mündelein
Titles: General Screen Enterprises
Music: Simon Fisher Turner
Musician (Saxophone/Clarinet): Gilad Atzman
Musician (Guitar/Keyboards): Simon Fisher Turner
Musician (Piano): Pete Rackham
Music Producer/Mixer: Richard Preston
Music Recorded at: London Rooster Studios
Sound Recordist: Ivan Sharrock
Sound Maintenance/Boom Operator: Don Banks
Re-recording Mixer: Mike Dowson
Sound Mixed at: Shepperton Sound
Sound Editor: Colin Miller

Foley Artists: Roy Baker, Felicity Cottrell, Jack Stew
Foley Editor: Jacques Leroide
Stunt Arranger: Graeme Crowther
Croupiers: Mary Coy, David Gant, Norbert Kleine, Lynsey Pinsent,
Ulrich Vogel, Elke Wartmann
Croupier Trainer: Carol Davis
Croupier Adviser: David Hamilton
Casino Consultant: David Harris
Shot at: Germany Info-Studios Monheim

Cast

Clive Owen (Jack Manfred)
Kate Hardie (Bella)
Alex Kingston (Jani de Villiers)
Gina McKee (Marion Neil)
Nicholas Ball (Jack Manfred Sr)
Nick Reding (Giles Cremorne)
Alexander Morton (David Reynolds)
Barnaby Kay (car dealer)
John Radcliffe (barber)
Sheila Whitfield (manicurist)
David Hamilton (casino supervisor)
Carol Davis (table supervisor)
Eddie Osei (West Indian punter)
Doremy Vernon (woman 1)
Claudine Carter (woman 2)
Ursula Alberts (Madame Claude)
Neville Phillips (white-haired man)
Paul Reynolds (Matt)
Ozzie Yue (Mr Tchai)
Joanna E. Drummond (Agnes)
Manfred Heiden (Mr Tchai's bodyguard)
Ciro De Chiara (Andros, cheat)
Rhona Mitra (girl with joint)
John Baker, Vida Garman (couple in toilet)
George Khan (coughing man)
Christine Niemöller (Pat)
Claudia Barth (waitress)
Tom Mannion (Detective Inspector Ross)
Arnold Zarom (Habib the terrorist)
James Clyde (Gordon)
Emma Lewis (Fiona)
Kate Fenwick (Chloe)
Rosemarie Dunham (Jewish woman)
Magnus Hastings (gigolo)
John Surman (loser)
Mark Long (gangster 1)
Michail Golzarandi (gangster 2)
Karl-Heinz Ciba (accusing punter)
Loretta Parnell (Lucy)
Simon Fisher Turner (ironic punter)

UK-Ireland-France-Germany 1998
94 mins

RETURN OF THE OUTSIDER: THE FILMS OF MIKE HODGES

Suspect + Rumour
Sun 1 May 14:20
The Terminal Man (director’s cut)
Mon 2 May 14:50; Mon 16 May 20:40
Mike Hodges in Conversation
Tue 3 May 18:15
Black Rainbow
Tue 3 May 20:40; Sun 22 May 18:10
Pulp
Wed 4 May 18:15; Wed 11 May 20:50
I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead
Thu 5 May 18:00; Mon 30 May 17:50
Morons from Outer Space
Fri 6 May 18:05; Wed 18 May 20:50 + World in Action: The Flipside

Flash Gordon
Sat 7 May 12:00; Thu 19 May 20:20 + The Tyrant King: Episode 1:
Scarface
Squaring the Circle + World in Action: Goldwater for President? or
How to Win Friends and Influence People
Sun 8 May 11:50
A Prayer for the Dying
Sun 8 May 15:20; Sun 15 May 18:10
Tempo
Tue 17 May 18:00
Murder by Numbers + The Hitchhiker: W.G.O.D
Thu 19 May 18:30
Dandelion Dead
Sat 21 May 13:10
New Tempo
Sun 29 May 11:50

Mike Hodges interviewed by The British Entertainment History Project:
<https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/mike-hodges>

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