



CAST

ROY SCHEIDER as Cohen
ADAM BALDWIN as Tate
HARLEY CROSS as Travis Knight
COOPER HUCKABEE as Jeff Knight
SUZANNE SAVOY as Martha Knight
MARCO PERELLA as FBI George
TOM CAMPITELLI as FBI Fred
ANDY GILL as FBI Roy

CREW

Written and directed by **ERIC RED**
Produced by **ANTHONY RUFUS ISAACS** and **JEFF YOUNG**
Director of Photography **VICTOR J. KEMPER, A.S.C.**
Editor **EDWARD ABROMS, A.C.E.**
Production Designer **DAVID M. HABER**
Music by **BILL CONTI**



A man in the foreground is wearing dark sunglasses and a dark jacket, looking towards the camera. In the background, another man in a light-colored trench coat and tie stands in a doorway. The setting appears to be an interior room with wooden paneling.

COHEN & TATE

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DRIVING BY NIGHT: ERIC RED ON THE OPEN ROAD

by Kim Newman

Film noir wasn't a genre until Nino Frank, a French critic, considered a rush of 1940s Hollywood pictures – mysteries, melodramas, crime movies, gangster films, private eye capers – and grouped them together as the bastard offspring of American hardboiled writing and German Expressionist cinematography. Thinking of the French paperback *Série Noire* line, he described this group of movies as *film noir*. The tag stuck with other critics, and eventually came into common usage. The people actually making the movies didn't realise they were contributing to a recognised movement. It wasn't until critic-turned-screenwriter Paul Schrader – who wrote an important article on the subject – scripted *Taxi Driver* (1976) that someone knowingly sat down to create a *film noir*.

The same goes for another American form, the road movie.

Arguably, the genre has been around since the infancy of cinema. American movies and American automobiles began at about the same times, and the industries rose in tandem. Silent films are full of car chases shot on the dirt roads around the sparsely-populated city of Los Angeles, with new-fangled gas buggies making ruts over the hooftracks of horses in cowboy films. The 'go west' narrative of the Western easily adapts to the age of the car – though the idealism of nation-forging wagon train and cattle drive stories is replaced by something else, a sense of lost aspiration when the journey isn't into a wilderness waiting to be tamed but from one city to another through big empty deserts. 'This used to be a hell of good a country,' says Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider* (1969), viewing the landscape from the back of a bike. 'I can't understand what's gone wrong with it.' The same question might be asked over and over in movies, from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1973) to *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977).

From *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) to *On the Road* (2012) – adapted from key road novels by John Steinbeck and Jack Kerouac – the movies have hit the road in search of a lost America. The term 'road movie' wasn't really used much until the 1980s: Joseph Strick made a film called *Road Movie* in 1974 and Mark Williams published a book called *The Road Movies* in 1982. Wim Wenders named his company Road Movies Filmproduktion in 1977 – having essayed *Kings of the Road* (1976), which stands in relation to American road movies the way spaghetti westerns do American cowboy films. Wenders especially recognises his debt to Nicholas Ray, director of the archetypal couple-on-the-run film *They*

Live By Night (1948). However, it was apparent in the '70s that the road movie was coming together as a genre in the way *film noir* did in the 1940s. *Noir* is mostly an urban genre, with driving confined to taxicabs and getaway cars, but there were *noir* road movies in which desperate crooks flee the cops (and fate). These outlaws usually wound up dead in a car crash or a hail of bullets: *You Only Live Once* (1937), *Gun Crazy* (1950), *Thunder Road* (1958), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967).

After *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider*, the road movie became a thing – with sub-genres like biker movies (*The Wild Angels*, 1967, *Hells Angels on Wheels*, 1968), trucker movies (*White Line Fever*, 1975, *Convoy*, 1978), road cop operas (*Electra Glide in Blue*, 1973), road-horror (*Duel*, 1971, *Race With the Devil*, 1975), road sci-fi (*Death Race 2000*, 1975, *Mad Max*, 1979), road comedy (*The Blues Brothers*, 1980, *The Cannonball Run*, 1981), existential action (*Two-Lane Blacktop*, 1971, *Vanishing Point*, 1971), and vintage outlaw couple sprees (*Badlands*, 1973, *Thieves Like Us*, 1974). This burst of activity was mostly in the 1970s, when gas prices were soaring and drivers seemed like cool rebels. In Walter Hill's *The Driver* (1978), getaway man Ryan O'Neal projects the sort of enviable, chilly pro rep that hit-man Alain Delon has in Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967); Ryan Gosling goes the same route in Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* (2011). When these films stop off at diners or small-town jails, there are petty arguments – Jack Nicholson blowing up at a waitress in *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) – or savage beatings, but on the open road there's a lulling, thrilling charge.

... then the eighties happened, and Eric Red – born Eric Joseph Durdaller – pitched to become the American cinema's prophet-poet-pariah of the road. He wrote and directed a couple of shorts – *Gunmen's Blues* (1981), a hit-man anecdote that owes a bit to Ernest Hemingway's short story 'The Killers', and *Telephone* (1986), a taut little piece about a would-be suicide. But he first got noticed with a pair of scripts for others – *The Hitcher* (1986), directed by Robert Harmon (who didn't go on to have as big a career as he deserved on the strength of this), and *Near Dark* (1987), directed by Kathryn Bigelow (who did, though it took her a while to click at the box office and the Academy Awards). *The Hitcher* is a cat-and-mouse psycho movie pitting the enigmatic John Ryder (Rutger Hauer) against spotty teen driver Jim Halsey (C. Thomas Howell). *Near Dark* features a clan of nomadic vampires who cruise the back-roads of the West in a van with blacked-out windows in search of redneck blood.

These aren't films about looking for America – though, in a very real sense, they find it. These are about getting to the next dawn or sunset alive, and being willing to kill to do it. Most '70s road movies relish the roadside eccentricities – even if only the snake farm of *Duel* – and are willing to take detours. Red's road scripts are darker, almost entirely about

driving by night – those vampires *can't* go out in the day, and Ryder seems mostly nocturnal. A stop at a diner or bar leads to a severed finger in the French fries and the pulling-apart of a likeable waitress (Jennifer Jason Leigh) or the massacre of a whole roomful of tough folks to the tune of The Cramps' cover of 'Fever'. 'Finger-lickin' good,' says a vampire stud (Bill Paxton) as he gorges on gore. Both films end with heroes surviving and perhaps purged of the taint of evil, but likely to be haunted by memories. We also have a sense that Jim Halsey and Caleb (Adrian Pasdar) won't be driving any distance in the near future.

When Red directed his first feature, it was almost a foregone conclusion that it would be a road movie. *Cohen & Tate* is also a hit-man film (tapping into another flourishing not-quite-genre) and a ruthless deconstruction of the male buddy movies that proliferated in the wake of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). The title evokes the likes of *Hickey & Boggs* (1972), *Freebie and the Bean* (1974), *Harry and Tonto* (1974 – the purest buddy film of all: Tonto is a cat), *Starsky & Hutch* (1975)... only hit-men Cohen (Roy Scheider) and Tate (Adam Baldwin) dislike each other and make a lousy team. They don't even properly kill the witness (Cooper Huckabee, from *The Funhouse*) who is their prime target... and they screw up a gig they could both have handled better if they were on their own. In the average road-buddy film, the back-and-forth banter of two guys in a car harks back to the earlier use of the term 'road movie' in the comedies Bing Crosby and Bob Hope made as a bickering team (though Bing and Bob surprisingly often tried to kill each other). In *Cohen & Tate*, the hard-of-hearing older pro Cohen seethes with embarrassment at every crude utterance from the leather-jacketed young maniac Tate. Cohen may be the worse partner, because he's just sensitive enough to know that murdering a child is wrong and needs to tell himself that he's only delivering a package... while Tate is a loose cannon who'd kill kids even if he wasn't being paid for it and happily rubs out innocents who blunder in front of his guns (Baldwin's best-known role at the time was the splendidly-named Animal Mother in *Full Metal Jacket*, 1985).

There's a movie-making trick for coming up with a new spin on an old premise by dropping it into a location-specific genre. It probably first came into use in westerns which could be pitched as "'Boule de Suif"... Out West' (*Stagecoach*, 1939) or 'Mutiny on the Bounty... Out West' (*Red River*, 1948). Latterly, favoured suffixes have been 'in space', 'in high school' or 'with tits'... as epitomised by *Jason X* (2001), which is 'Friday the 13th... in space', *O* (2001), which is 'Othello... in high school' and *Showgirls* (1995), which is 'All About Eve... with tits'. '... on the road' is also a useful modifier, as demonstrated by *Roadgames* (1981), which is 'Rear Window... on the road', and the remake *Death Race* (2008), which is 'The Longest Yard... in cars'. *Cohen & Tate* is "The Ransom of the Red Chief"... on the road'. First published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1907, O. Henry's short story is the one about the two crooks who kidnap a rich child and then find him so annoying that they become

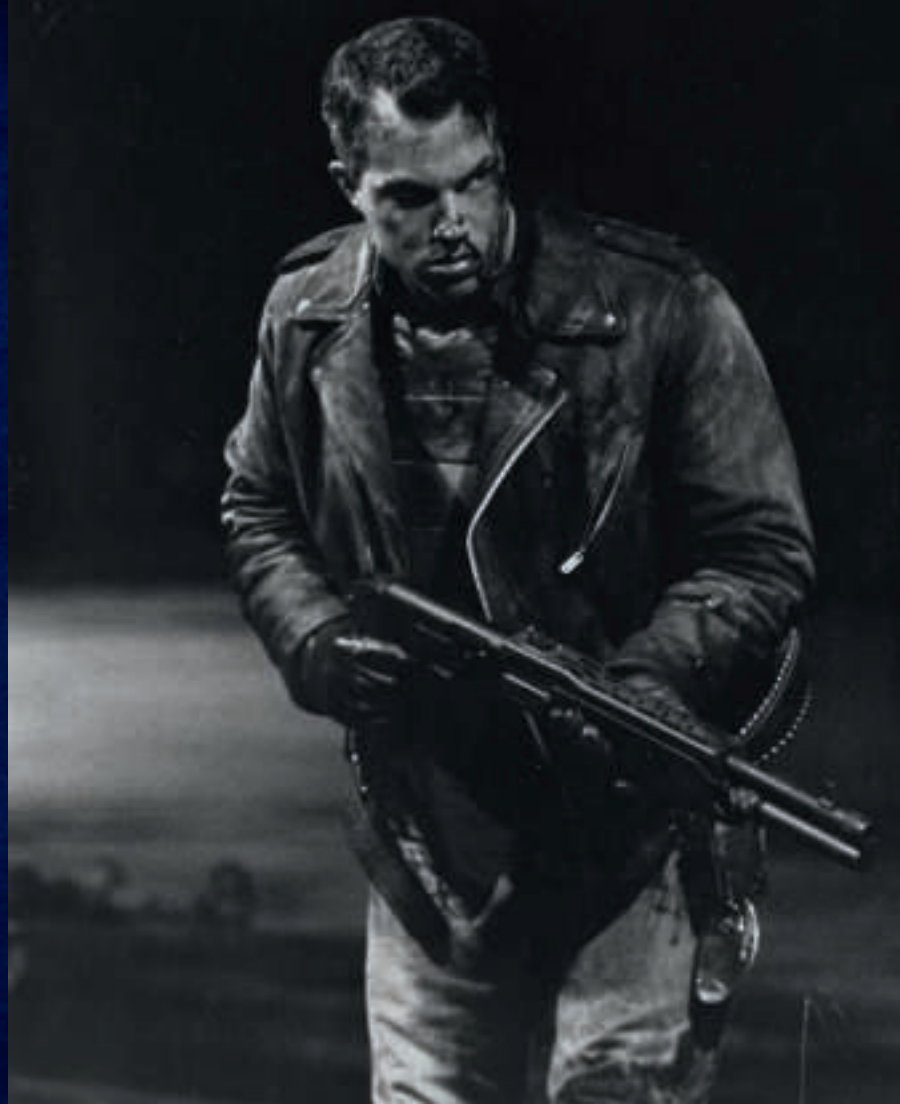


desperate to give him back. Howard Hawks directed a straight adaptation of the story included in the anthology movie *O. Henry's Full House* (1952), and the premise is frequently reworked for TV episodes. The horror movie *Whisper* (2007) is an inspired mash-up of O. Henry and *The Omen*, with kidnapers realising they've abducted the young Antichrist, and another demon variant features in 'The Ransom of Rusty Rex' an episode of *Tales of Halloween* (2015).

Young Travis Knight (Harley Cross) is a more sympathetic kid than the Red Chief, but similarly proves too much of a handful for his grown-up captors – who have to transport him across a state line to deliver him to their mysterious employers for questioning (and, probably, disposal). Children fighting back against evil adults who underestimate them is often played for comedy thrills, as in *The Goonies* (1985) and *Home Alone* (1990). *Cohen & Tate*, like all Red's scripts, has very black humour but plays its suspense angle straight. *Bad Moon* (1996), one of Red's subsequent films as writer-director, is about a boy who cries werewolf – menaced by his own monster father, with only a plucky dog as protector. Travis acts like a kid in the back seat, issuing demands (for the inevitable pee-stop that leads to a gas station holocaust), having tantrums and all but whining 'are we there yet?' at every opportunity as he calculatedly sets his captors against each other. The hit-man movies Red is thinking of – the 1946 and 1966 versions of *The Killers*, *The Line-Up* (1958), *The Mechanic* (1972) – often feature two-man teams (sometimes, a spotter and a hitter) who mesh as pros, even if they often turn on each other in the finales. Maybe young Travis has seen those films too, because he plays on Cohen's suspicion that retirement from his profession doesn't involve a watch and a pension but a brief pain in the back of the skull and a glimpse of red mess before darkness (Tate's favourite joke – 'what's the last thing that goes through a bug's mind when it hits a windshield? *Its ass!*'). And he needles Tate, recognising that the hulking, murderous grown-up is also pretty much infantile.

Since *Cohen & Tate*, Red has co-scripted *Blue Steel* (1989) for Kathryn Bigelow and written and directed another road movie (*Undertow*, 1996) and three interesting horror films (*Body Parts*, 1991, *Bad Moon* and *100 Feet*, 2008).

Kim Newman is a novelist, critic and broadcaster. His fiction includes the Anno Dracula series, The Quorum, Life's Lottery, Professor Moriarty: The House of the D'Urbervilles and An English Ghost Story. His non-fiction includes Nightmare Movies and BFI Classics studies of Cat People, Doctor Who and Quatermass and the Pit. He co-wrote the comic miniseries Witchfinder: Mysteries of Unland with Maura McHugh, art by Tyler Crook. He is a contributing editor to Sight & Sound and Empire magazines.







ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Cohen & Tate is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 2.0 stereo sound. The HD master was provided by MGM via Hollywood Classics.

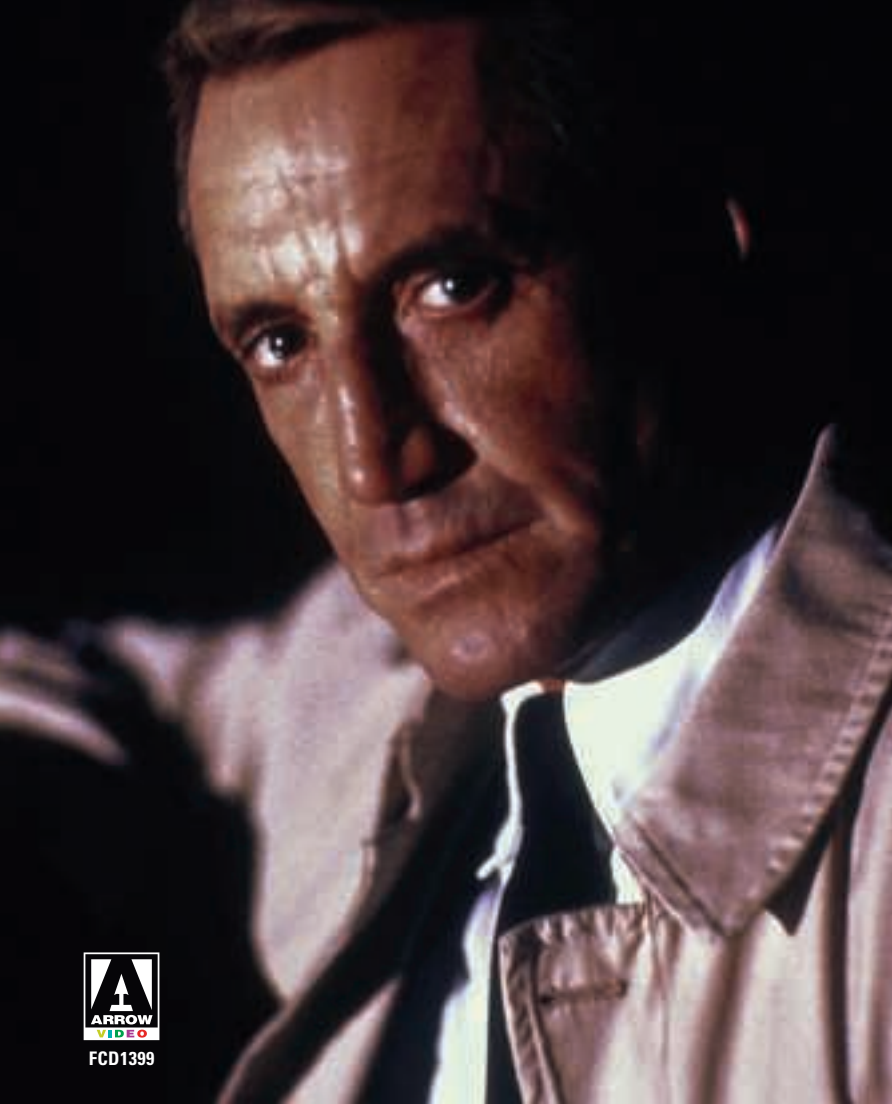
PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**
Executive Producer: **Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer: **James White**
Production Assistant: **Liane Cunje**
QC Manager: **Nora Mehenni**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling: **IBF**
Artist: **Graham Humphreys**
Design: **Jack Pemberton**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Ewan Cant, Graham Humphreys, Kim Newman, Eric Red





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