



## DILLINGER U.S. (1973)

**Director** John Millius **Producer** Buzz Feitshans **Screenplay** John Millius  
**Cinematography** Jules Brenner **Music** Barry DeVorzon **Cast** Warren Oates, Ben Johnson, Michelle Phillips, Cloris Leachman, Harry Dean Stanton, Richard Dreyfuss, Geoffrey Lewis, John P. Ryan, Steve Kanaly, John Martino, Roy Jenson, Read Morgan

*Dillinger*—the most uncompromising movie about the notorious gangster made to date—is more than “just” an excellent bio-pic of an infamous man. It is the definitive version of the Dillinger story in spite of, or perhaps because of, its “freedom” in dealing with facts. It is graced with the impeccable Warren Oates as the larger-than-life man who robbed banks for a living. Paired with equally excellent Ben Johnson as his arch-nemesis, the dedicated Melvin Purvis of the FBI, Oates breathes life into the archetypal robber.

Director John Millius wisely chooses to present this story as a mythical battle, with both main characters carefully sketched through clever vignettes: Dillinger is a gentleman-robber, a folk hero, a superstar relishing the attention of the media and audience (his “victims”) even more than the money. This doesn’t mean that he is glamorized however, and we are shown the cruelty of his ways and vivid collateral damage of his exploits on more than one occasion. The same goes for his opponent: Melvin Purvis is a fearless hero, erect in the face of danger, gallant towards the ladies and strangely respectful towards his enemy, but is also not exceedingly law-abiding (“Shoot Dillinger

◀ **This is the most unapologetic *Dillinger* movie made to date, and despite its mythical qualities, actor Warren Oates’s resemblance to Dillinger lends it an air of plausibility.**

and we'll figure out a way to make it legal," he says at one point, and on another occasion he shoots a killer from an ambush, regardless of his "human rights").

While the background of this story is obvious (the Depression), it is kept where it should be: in the background. Millius never strives to over-explain his characters who remain balanced between history and legend. The script is written with an

*“THIS COULD BE ONE OF THE BIG MOMENTS IN YOUR LIFE; DON’T MAKE IT YOUR LAST!” JOHN DILLINGER*

admirable economy, managing to cover not only the basic events in Dillinger's career but also finding the time for some special treasures, like the episode with the stubborn, fearless geezer at the gas pump, or a priceless moment when Purvis shows his gun to a boy who'd rather grow up to be a gangster. A typical example of an invented, but so-good-it-must-be-true moment is the scene in which Purvis spots Dillinger in a restaurant where he's celebrating with his fiancé: Instead of grabbing his gun or calling for back-up, he sends the gangster and his lady a bottle of champagne, promising that their next encounter won't be so gentle. It is moments like these, together with the relentlessly bloody shootout scenes, and countless memorable, witty pieces of dialogue, that raise this movie far above a standard gangster melodrama and make it a unique, clever, layered, and enjoyable piece of Americana. **DO**