

Death Wish (Deep Focus)

Christopher Sorrentino



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Deep Focus is a series of film books with a fresh approach. Take the smartest, liveliest writers in contemporary letters and let them loose on the most vital and popular corners of cinema history: midnight movies, the New Hollywood of the sixties and seventies, film noir, screwball comedies, international cult classics, and more. Passionate and idiosyncratic, each volume of *Deep Focus* is long-form criticism that's relentlessly provocative and entertaining.

Christopher Sorrentino's examination of *Death Wish* is the second entry in the series. The fourth collaboration between director Michael Winner and actor Charles Bronson, *Death Wish* was the apotheosis of a succession of films hitting screens during the seventies—including *Bullitt*, *Dirty Harry*, and *Walking Tall*—that tacked against a prevailing liberal wind in Hollywood cinema. Exploiting audience fears of a bestial "other" infesting American cities, and explicitly linking law and order with a pastoral ideal of the Old West (and exurban subdivisions), its glib endorsement of vigilantism infuriated liberal critics even as it filled theaters with cheering audiences. Sorrentino examines *Death Wish* in its various contexts—as movie, as provocation, as social commentary, as political tautology, and as depiction of urban life—and considers its lasting influence on cinema.



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