INSIDE THE MIND OF A VILLAIN

In his new film, *Carter*, Michael Caine plays the leading rôle of a successful small-time crook, a 'minder' for a London organization specializing in protection racket, jukebox concessions, and blue films.

'It is a difficult rôle to get right today,' says Caine. 'I didn't want to play the cliché heavy, the hardcase with a soft centre. Actors have been doing that since Paul Muni's *Scarface*. I wanted, very simply, the truth now.'

Determined to get it just right, Caine spent three months researching the character of Jack Carter. 'I met some very dodgy gentlemen before I found the right one. The man that I could truthfully model the crook Carter on.'

He began a series of exhaustive interviews. 'I wanted to know how he felt, what he thought, what he believed in. I wanted to know his politics, his tailor, his religion, if he had one. I wanted to know where he went to school, the girls he had and his sister.

The following dialogue is taken from these talks. Only names have been changed. It is the unique document, an actor's blueprint for a rôle that could be one of the most fascinating creations of the cinema in the seventies, a villain to rank with classic studies of Clyde Barrow and Al Capone. But it is far more—it is both a brilliant and revealing insight into the mind of a villain, 1970's style.

Order of the bath: Carter whets Glenda's appetite for a 'short conversation'

➔ Caine: Do you really convince yourself to be a success, Jack?

Carter: Yes. I set out to get myself out of a bad situation and I've done that. Yet still I feel I've gone that big poverty of my childhood up North. I'm now part of a big, successful business. I'm proud of that.

Caine: Did you have a happy childhood?

Carter: No more miserable than any of the other kids in my street. But I had the imagination to know how rotten it was. I used to go down to the station and watch the trains going down to London. Even when I was a toddler I knew that was the way out.

Caine: Were you a very sensitive kid?

Carter: Do me a favour! I've never cared about other people. I'm only sensitive to what other people do to me.

Caine: Were you bright at school, Jack?

Carter: Not from the point of view of marks. A lot of me was in trouble. A lot of time I was sent home. I was in a lot of boltons at school. I never let anybody put anything over on me and the teachers don't like that kind of kid, he's put down as a smart-arse. I didn't get too much pertinent attention from the teachers, not in any constructive way at least. Teachers are from a completely different class. They look after their own. Kids like me they educate to a minimum standard.

Caine: Are you bitter about that, Jack?

Carter: Haven't got the time. Anyway, they had a very tough job. They had to beat an education into kids in my old manor. And I never got an education because I wasn't interested in nothing cos Jack Carter.

Caine: What was your first job?

Carter: Stealing fireworks. I didn't get caught for that. I got caught for stealing a bike later on, and one or two other things. I was sent to an approved school. I don't know why approves of it, I didn't. It was borstal to teen.

Caine: How old were you, Jack, when you lost your virginity?

Carter: Well, I did a lot of snuggling before I knew about sex. I lost it when I came out of borstal. I was there for about eight weeks. I had to make up for all that time and when I got out I was a regular excited. I started, I pulled a little cracker at a dance. I knew all the lads had been there before me. You always do something easy for your first job. I knocked her off in a bombed house. She could see the fire, the rats scampering about and was scared stiff and I hung round my neck with sat my bother.

It was the first time I found that feel of power used to your advantage, as a matter of fact, I was not it quite often since. In different circumstances of course. I think you learn a great deal from it.

Caine: What are you afraid of, Jack?

Carter: Nothing. Nobody. If you've led the life like I've led, if you get what you want, you've got to be prepared to die to hang on to it. See what I mean? There've been several times when I could have died. But I didn't worry at all.

Caine: Not at all?

Carter: Death is two things. One is to die in the physical sense. The other is to go back to where I started. Which to do in . . . . a mental sense. I'm not prepared to do that either way. Mike. But I am prepared to die. I don't have to have to go back to that mental death. Know what I mean?

Caine: Are you scared of going on living, getting old? Presumably you avoid paying tax, national insurance and getting into pension schemes.

Carter: I disagree with the Government. I disagree with the way they tax people to keep everybody alive. I'm against the cruelty of me, what I do. But I don't think I'm doing something for what I get. What do you ever see in the old manor now? Bums hanging around waiting to cadge a bob. Bugger that. National Health. I don't believe in that. And all those pensioners who go to work for an hour and a half every morning just to help keep all those bums. That's one thing I don't do, I just won't pay to keep a lot of other people.

Caine: You've clearly got a few bob, Jack, how do you avoid tax?

Carter: I do pay some tax. We've got some very straight things going. We've got several clubs, all on the board. We have launderettes. We also run a couple of betting offices and the betting levy on them is diabolical. But, of course, there is a lot of cash dealings. I don't own up to half of it, do I?

Caine: The life you lead is hard, Jack. You have to be fit, in ten years, you will be less fit, less able to look after yourself. There'll be new Jack Carters, younger, fitter, harder.

Carter: I know that. It isn't easy. It isn't tough. The life I lead is tough for others. I shall get old like everybody else.

I shall probably lose some of my prowess for dulling it up. But you can't always get yourself looked up. A bullet from a gun fired by a seventy-year old man goes just as fast as one fired by a kid.

Caine: Do you really kid yourself, Jack?

Carter: Sometimes. Sometimes I don't. The times I like myself are when I've been sent on a job and you do it well without having to hurt anybody. Nobody likes violence. I'm not a psychopath like gangsters you read about in books, the Marquis de Sade and all that. I don't get my pleasure out of hurting people.

Caine: How do you 'influence' people?

Carter: When people step out of line, you'll have a conversation with them. But if the conversation goes on too long they might think you're scared, or you're not serious. So I become a specialist in what you might call short chats.

I am a reasonable sort of bloke, I would say a gentle sort of bloke in a way. I go and tell them what I want. I don't take one eye to eye with me . . . that's what I mean by short chats.

The happy time is when I can make your heart as much intelligence as me; when I can use my intuition and sees the sense in it and he also sees the stupidity in getting himself hurt.

Caine: Do you ever get hurt, Jack?

Carter: It's like the fella says: 'How do you go about shooting someone up?' The other fella says: 'You give him a gun and you shoot.' 'What about two?' 'Well, you get that.' That's it, you always reckon to cop two. You nearly always cop number two if you engage in fisticuffs. But I don't like that and I lose my temper.

That's something I haven't mentioned, my temper. When I start, I don't stop. Even when the punter agrees with me, I don't stop. Because getting a whack on the hooter not only hurts, it's an indignity. And I like to think of myself as a very dignified man.

Caine: Do you have many friends, Jack?

Carter: No. I'm a loner. You can't trust anybody. And you shouldn't. Why bother? You trust somebody and they are in a position to show you upset you, hurt you. It's a burden, really. Scum and friendship. Friendship is a burden. It's a responsibility. Never tell anybody a secret. Always keep it all to yourself. If you don't need company, stay alone.

Caine: Nobody?

Carter: I don't agree with all that boys together. I saw a record in a shop, a cover, which I thought disgusting. A load of clothes in a shower with no Ty Songs. Yes, It's called *Bad Enough*. I think a bloke sitting in a load in a shower with a couple of birds, singing 'Songs, if they're going to have no clothes on.

Caine: Sounds good. I don't find another bloke in the shower with a couple of birds up and all that. I reckon I'd be spend your time in the pub with the lads, cos I think I'm going to be off with another fella. I think that's where all the infidelity starts . . . because those burkin are always singing rugby songs with no clothes on in showers or we're passed in a pub with a load of other fellas, or shouting their heads off at football Saturday afternoons. I think men like to be alone sometimes on Saturday afternoon than enough in the pub.

Caine: Have you ever been married, Jack?

Carter: Do me a favour, Micky. No, I've lived a bachelor life, near the King's Road, and I've had fantastic birds. Not any old slags. It's got to be a bit special. I think I've had birds of every nationality—and I've never been abroad.

Caine: Don't you want to see the world, Jack?

Carter: I like Kingsland Road. I'm a bit of a Londoner, I'm afraid.

Caine and his Richard, cool Geraldine Moffatt

Jack, what your type of man is very attractive to the upper-class birds?

Carter: It's not a legend, Micky. I'll tell you what I've done a few times. You know Harrods? You sit in the fruit-juice bar there, that's where you pull that sort of bird. Or in the coffee shops around there. It's a real doddle.

Caine: What is the secret of your success?

Carter: What it is, these birds always strike me as being more passionate than their blokes. Like, all those obvious wonder and hooray Harrys don't look in the direction of a piece of a canary let alone a woman. You can see it in their eyes, these toffee nosed birds are just waiting for a bloke to get hold of them. I don't mean smash them ground or anything like that . . . but be in charge. When they meet someone like me they are a pushover. Sometimes you might feel like a prize bull or something, being used. They never want their friends to meet you. But, then, I don't particularly want to meet their friends, do I?

Caine: How do you behave with your women, Jack?

Carter: With the punters I'm a man of few words. Understand, there are two sorts of birds, see. One you fall in love with and get hitched. The other kind of bird is the one-night stand variety. I never go to a pub and have a quick one and never see her again. A regular upper bird I'll go to again and again. I'm a man of few words.

Caine: Have you ever done time, Jack?

Carter: Only when they've got nothing. I don't go any sexual pleasure out of the nick. I'm a bit of a romantic. I even buy Guerlain chocolates.

I never let them stay long. Well, not often. I like them to scarper about two o'clock in the morning, for a mind, or if she's a bit up the market, I'll lay on a Hertz, with a driver in uniform, not likely to go after it for himself, know what I mean?

Caine: Have you ever been kept by a woman, Jack?

Carter: Never. I can't stand being kept. I have to cut on a bit of business myself.

Today's crook: One hand on his gun, the other . . .

a pimp, you know what I mean, living off girls, then you hear one deliver a really short conversation. I take the first opportunity to put the boot in. I think we ought to have concentration camps in this country for pimps and drug pushers. None of the people I work for have anything to do with that.

Caine: I thought you dabbled a bit in blue films?

Carter: Not guilty son. Part of the organization is in to it. I won't have anything to do with that. I don't mind if a couple of brass are hired to do a blue picture with some punter who won't take his socks off. But sometimes they row in innocent kids and I don't agree with that. I keep well clear.

Caine: Do you have any tanned away, Jack?

Carter: The organization's been on all right. They look after me because it's not everybody who will do the things I do. Most of the world's got no balls.

Caine: Bottle?

Carter: Guts. Most people today are looking for a pension. They're twenty-two years old and asking about pensions. My pension is my jukeboxes. I run it dead straight with a couple of honest mugs. I wouldn't have anybody with a record working for me. I pay them a wage. The rest goes to Jersey, the Isle of Man, I've got a good accountant.

Caine: What car do you drive, Jack?

Carter: A Bentley Continental. Sweetbread. I got it fairly cheap. It's a beautiful grand, from a fella who was into one or two things and had to leave the country quick and needed a few bob. I've had a few motors. I had one of the first E-type Jaguars. A navy blue DB5. I had a little Lotus for a while. I never have a foreign car. What I can't understand is how all those English people read about how we're going down the drain because we've got so many imports and stuff —they still go out and buy French and Italian and bleedin' Kraut jam jars.

Caine: Where do you like to go in the evenings?

Carter: Well, I do my own clubs, don't I? But for pure relaxation? I like the Playboy Club. No roughstuff up there. Very nice people. I don't have any business interests up there. Although I don't agree with all that bunny travel business about. That's silly. I don't see the sense in a bird walking in half bloody naked and they say you can look but don't touch. What about the birds? Don't they want to be touched? I mean, they're not nuns up there, those birds.

Caine: Who impresses you?

Carter: What, like well-known figures? Enoch Powell. I think he's bloody good. He's got the right idea. Of course, we're overcrowded here, in a literal sense, elbowing the spades. Mind you, some of their jungle bunnies aren't bad.

Enoch, he's about the only politician who talks politically.

Caine: George Brown?

Carter: What do you get when you cross a pig with a Jew? They ruin the country to the tune of millions and for the layabouts—their supporters—and the minute the Queen offers them a bedridge they're in like Flynn. What is that? They start off on soapboxes damning the Royal Family and end up thirty years later licking their boots. Let them never make Enoch Powell a lord—and he's the only one amongst them with the right idea.

Caine: Are you capable of going straight?

Carter: I don't know what I mean, going straight. I've never gone crooked. I've bent the rules a bit . . . but I've never done any real bird, not since borstal and what's that? You see, if you don't mind me saying so Mike, people like you have got the wrong idea of looking at things.

Caine: How do you mean?

Carter: Well, you see a geezer with a scar on his face, a razor slash. And you say: 'He must be tough.' But it's not him you have to worry about, it's the fella who gave it to him you have to watch out for. Do you get what I mean? See what I mean?

Caine: Yes, I think I've nothing have a lot of respect for a bloke's record. They say: 'Do you know he spent twenty years in prison. He's a great criminal.' That's not a great criminal. That's a great jailbird. I don't want to spend five minutes inside. If I had to pay my I'd let everybody bleed in' bodgerigar loose. I don't have respect for anyone to the zoo, you know. Never. All those people that keep animals and birds and that caged up want to serve a bit of time. You can't keep living things in a cage so they are not free to do what they want to do. I'd go round and sort all those people out with budgerigars if I could. It's always old ladies who keep those birds in a cage. They can't get about themselves and they want something else trapped.

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to worry about, it's the fella who gave it to him. Do you have to watch out for that how do you recognise him? See what I mean? Punters who don't know how nothing have a lot of respect for a bloke's record. They say: 'Do you know he spent twenty years in prison. He's a great criminal.' That's not a great criminal. That's a great jailbird. I don't want to spend five minutes inside. If I had to pay my I'd let everybody bleed in' budgerigar loose. I don't have respect for anyone to the zoo, you know. Never. All those people that keep animals and birds and that caged up want to serve a bit of time. You can't keep living things in a cage so they are not free to do what they want to do. I'd go round and sort all those people out with budgerigars if I could. It's always old ladies who keep those birds in a cage. They can't get about themselves and they want something else trapped.

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