

# Blu-Ray Review: ‘Gomorrah’ Galvanizes With Raw Portrait of Crime

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 1, 2009 - 12:33pm

- [Blu-ray Review](#) [2]
- [Gomorrah](#) [3]
- [GoodFellas](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [6]
- [Matteo Garrone](#) [7]
- [The Criterion Collection](#) [8]
- [The Godfather](#) [9]
- [The Sopranos](#) [10]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [11]

CHICAGO – Matteo Garrone’s revelatory crime picture joins the esteemed group of worthy foreign film Oscar contenders (like “4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days”) inexplicably snubbed by the Academy. But such accolades are meaningless compared to the reaction it has received, breaking box office records in its limited release, while acquiring the passionate support of film icons like Martin Scorsese. It has gained a reputation for being the “ultimate Mafia movie” (even though it’s actually about a different crime family), besting everything from “The Godfather” and “GoodFellas” to “The Sopranos.”



Yet Garrone doesn’t even attempt to mimic the larger-than-life style and scope of Coppola or Scorsese, and his film achieves an entirely different kind of greatness, stripping away any shred of romanticism or artifice to reveal the primal horror lying behind scenes of deceptively mundane life. His film also has the distinction of being set in modern-day Italy, which gives the film’s events an unsettling immediacy devoid of any nostalgic undertones (Tony Bennett is nowhere to be found on this soundtrack).



Gomorrah was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on November 24th, 2009.  
*Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection*

“Gomorrah” is a fitting title, partly because it sounds like Comorra, the name of Italy’s most powerful crime syndicate, of which the film is about. It will be an education for anyone unfamiliar with the group, which isn’t nearly as well known as the Mafia, but is a good deal larger. The film’s end titles come as a shock, estimating the Comorra’s yearly revenue at \$250 billion, while revealing that the group is currently invested in the World Trade Center’s reconstruction. The script, credited with six writers, is based on the book by Roberto Saviano, who acquired his facts by going undercover. His story would be worthy of a film itself, and he now lives under 24-hour police surveillance.



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*Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection*

The people in “Gomorrah” are not wealthy crime lords but ordinary citizens of Naples enlisted to carry out the group’s dirty work. Garrone intercuts five stories from the book, whose diverse subjects are connected only by the organization that rules them all. There’s a 13-year-old boy (Salvatore Abruzzese) fated for recruitment, a seasoned bag man (Gianfelice Imparato) who delivers money to families of imprisoned mobsters, a suave executive (Toni Servillo) intent on mentoring a fresh-faced college grad (Carmine Paternoster), and a dressmaker (Salvatore Cantalupo) who risks his life to aid Chinese rivals. There’s also two “Beavis and Butthead”-type teens (Ciro Petrone and Marco Macor) who’ve become the film’s trademark image, as they charge along a lake in their underwear, firing guns into the water. They embody the current generation raised on Scarface and Tony Montana, who reign as the figureheads of their pop culture-fueled religion.

Even though “Godfather,” “GoodFellas,” and even “Scarface” are deeply sobering films, they are loved by fans for the moments where viewers get to experience the initial exhilaration of mobster life. “Gomorrah” offers no such escapism, since there’s no one to identify with except the Comorra’s helpless victims, whose life choices boil down to joining the mob, or dying by their hand. There’s no buildup to the outbursts of violence, which occur with a sudden, businesslike swiftness, yet leave the protagonists (and audience) trembling and dazed. This makes the film’s global popularity all the more remarkable. Crime always pays at the box office, yet this film has the power to raise awareness of the Comorra’s crimes and influence, which is the first step towards justice.

“Gomorrah” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), and comes equipped with improved English subtitles. The special features include an abundance of behind-the-scenes footage, though the real gems on the disc are extended interviews with Garrone and Saviano. The filmmaker discusses his experience working on the streets of Naples, while the author offers fascinating details on the history behind each of the film’s stories.

*‘Gomorrah’ is released by The Criterion Collection and stars Toni Servillo, Gianfelice Imparato, Maria Nazionale, Salvatore Cantalupo, Gigio Morra, Salvatore Abruzzese, Marco Macor, Ciro Petrone and Carmine Paternoster. It was written by Maurizio Braucci & Ugo Chiti & Gianna Di Gregorio & Matteo Garrone & Massimo Gaudioso & Roberto Saviano and directed by Matteo Garrone. It was released on November 24th, 2009. It is Not Rated.*

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**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 25 2024 - 2:40pm):**

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gomorrah>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/goodfellas>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/matt-fagerholm>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/matteo-garrone>
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- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-sopranos>
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