

KING OF THE BANDITS
synopsis
Original Screenplay by Vito Brancato

Sicily 1943. U.S. forces have driven out the last of the Nazi troops. Ravaged by war, the island remains in a state of chaos. Extreme poverty, strict food rationing, and total corruption at every level forces Sicilians to rely on the black market for their very survival.

In a small village just outside Palermo, twenty-one year old Salvatore Giuliano is arrested for smuggling two sacks of corn to help feed his family. He refuses to inform against the farmer who sold him the grain. With no money to bribe the officers, they threaten him with a beating. A struggle ensues and Giuliano manages to break away. He runs, they open fire! He's hit in the side, but fires back with a small pistol and kills one of the policemen. Though wounded, he escapes into the thick brush on the side of the road and disappears.

The next day Giuliano is discovered in a field by a farmer, unconscious and nearly dead. The town's elderly doctor is called in. Though Giuliano has lost much blood, the bullet passed through him cleanly, barely missing his liver. He will survive, but once he is well enough, he must move to the hills with the thieves and army deserters to escape prosecution.

The Italian authorities have discovered Giuliano's identity. Unable to find him, they storm into his small hometown of Montelepre and arrest his family and friends. Enraged, Giuliano single-handedly stages a successful jail break and rescues his people.

News of Giuliano's heroics spread quickly. He is approached by members of a newly formed "Sicilian Freedom" group. Their objective is to break away from the corrupt Italian government of Rome. Poorly armed and untrained, they are crushed in their first head to head battle with the Italian forces.

Driven by his intense hatred for the authorities, Giuliano puts together a small band of fighters from his inner circle of friends and relatives; common working men and farmers. To raise funds for the cause he kidnaps wealthy Italians for ransom, often passing money on to needy Sicilians. He quickly becomes a folk hero to the oppressed people of the island. They dub him the "Sicilian Robin Hood"...who steals from the rich and gives to the poor. His good looks and charm quickly earn him the nickname "The Gentleman Bandit" in the Italian press as he takes on the image of a matinee idol throughout Italy. As his reputation grows, he attracts the interest of the politicians in Rome as well as the heads of Sicily's Mafia. Giuliano's list of powerful enemies also grows, and he is forced to form an alliance with the Mafia. For a fee, they will offer their protection, influence

and information. Secretly, they work with the politicians in Rome and exploit Giuliano skills and popularity to thwart the growing Communist threat.

It's now 1950. For seven years Giuliano has waged successful guerilla warfare against the government forces. Though he is only 27 years old, he has now become a true political force throughout Italy. His reputation spreads even to the United States as he is featured in a Life magazine article. He half jokingly requests that President Harry Truman make Sicily an American state.

As Giuliano's reputation and popularity reaches unprecedented heights, his secret allies in the government and Mafia fear he has become too dangerous and "knows too much". One by one his closest associates are arrested or killed, and members of his family including his mother and father are jailed on conspiracy charges. A close member of Giuliano's inner circle is recruited and an assassination plot his planned.

Giuliano is offered complete amnesty provided he ends his guerilla war. His family and friends will be freed and he is guaranteed safe passage to the United States. There he will be reunited with his childhood sweetheart who bore his only child in America.

At a remote seaside home he awaits a small plane that will lead him to true freedom. Giuliano never boards that plane however, as he is assassinated by the man he trusts most.

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