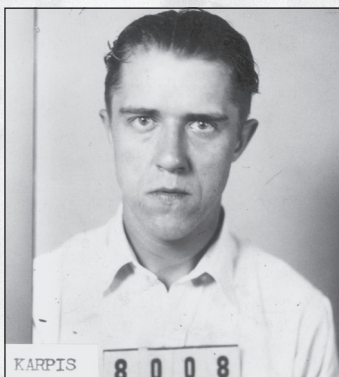


MEET THE CAST

Did you know that several characters in this book are real-life people from history? Here are their stories.



ALVIN KARPIS

Alvin Karpis never became as famous as criminals like Al Capone or John Dillinger, but he didn't mind. Unlike many of the big-name crooks of his time, Karpis wasn't flashy or loud. This low profile helped him pull off fifteen bank robberies, three jail breaks, and two kidnappings.

OLD CREEPY

Alvin Karpis went by several nicknames. People called him "Slim" because he was so thin and "Chi" because he loved the city of Chicago. But the nickname that really stuck was "Old Creepy." Most people assumed the nickname came from his sinister smile and long, scary face, but Karpis claimed that he'd earned the name because he was so good at creeping around and avoiding law enforcement.

THE LAST TRAIN ROBBERY

On November 7th, 1935, Karpis and his gang pulled off the last successful train robbery in American history. In the small town of Garrettsville,

Ohio, Karpis ambushed a train carrying \$45,650 to pay factory workers. In today's money, that's over \$1 million. Karpis took the loot to a waiting airplane and flew to Arkansas, making him the first criminal to get away by air.



A WASTED LIFE

Karpis tried outwitting police by meticulously planning every job, moving around the country, and even paying a doctor to remove his fingerprints. None of it mattered. The FBI arrested him on May 1st, 1936. Karpis then spent twenty-five years in the infamous Alcatraz prison, earning the record for longest stay on the island. Karpis admitted a few years before his death that crime had led to a “wasted life.”

THE BARKER BOYS

If Alvin Karpis was the brains behind the Karpis-Barker gang, the Barker brothers were the muscle. The “Bloody Barkers” were never afraid to get their hands dirty as the gang terrorized towns throughout the Midwest.



Fred Barker

PRISON PALS

Karpis met Fred Barker (aka “Bowl Cut” Barker) in the Kansas State Penitentiary. The two eventually became cellmates and best buddies. One of their first bonding activities after getting out of jail was robbing a bank in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They drove away with \$7,000, dropping roofing tacks behind their getaway car to keep the police from following them.



Doc Barker



Ma Barker

TEAM UP

A year later, big brother Arthur “Doc” Barker (aka “Mustache” Barker) got out of prison and joined the gang. Together, they went on a bank-robbing spree before deciding they could make more money by kidnapping wealthy businessmen. The Karpis-Barker gang was so successful that John Dillinger himself suggested that their gangs should team up.

MA

Legend has it that the real leader of the Karpis-Barker gang was actually Fred and Doc Barker’s mom. Although we now understand that Kate “Ma” Barker wasn’t the criminal mastermind that rumors built her up to be, she did live with the gang until

the day she died. Ma Barker looked after the criminals, and in return, the criminals took care of her.

THOMAS EDISON

Tommy Twinkles is a fictional character, but he gets his own section here because his attitude toward gangsters comes from real life. For several years in the 1930s, gangsters actually became heroes to many Americans. Why?

DEPRESSION

During the Great Depression years of the early 1930s, the economy was so bad that banks began failing, losing all the hard-earned money people

had deposited into them. Some Americans cheered gangsters who robbed banks because they felt that bankers were the real bad guys.

PUBLIC ENEMIES

Gangsters lost popularity as they started hurting more and more innocent people. Authorities took advantage of this attitude shift by enlisting everyday people to help them track down these “public enemies” through things like announcement at the start of movies. Before every movie, audiences were instructed to look left and right because a notorious gangster might be sitting in their row.

G-MEN

By the time Alvin Karpis got caught, his type was no longer idolized. The man who arrested him—J. Edgar Hoover—



J. Edgar Hoover

represented a new type of American hero. Hoover had just formed the FBI, an elite squad of crime fighters that gangsters called the “G-Men” (government men). By the end of the 1930s, these G-Men were so popular that it was harder to get into the FBI than an elite Ivy League college.

Special thanks to Julie A. Thompson and her book The Hunt for the Last Public Enemy in Northeastern Ohio for the facts found in this section.
