



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Apocalypse Now: Final Cut

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Director: Francis Ford Coppola
Production Company: Omni Zoetrope
Producer: Francis Coppola
Co-produced by: Fred Roos, Gray Frederickson, Tom Sternberg
Associate Producer: Mona Skager
Location Co-ordinator: Jack English
Post-production Co-ordinators: Doug Claybourne, Barbara Marks
Assistant Director: Jerry Ziesmer
Script Supervisors: Raymond Quiroz, Nancy Tonery
Casting: Terry Liebling, Vic Ramos
Screenplay: John Milius, Francis Coppola
Based on the novel by: Joseph Conrad *
Narration [Written] by: Michael Herr
Director of Photography: Vittorio Storaro
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Stephen H. Burum
Aerial Cameraman: David Butler
Camera Operator: Enrico Umetelli
Special Effects Co-ordinators: Joseph Lombardi, A.D. Flowers
Special Effects: Special Effects Unlimited
Supervising Editor: Richard Marks
Editors: Walter Murch, Gerald B. Greenberg, Lisa Fruchtmann
Additional Editors: Blackie Malkin, Evan Lottman
Associate Editor: George Berndt
Production Designer: Dean Tavoularis
Art Director: Angelo Graham
Costume Supervisor: Charles E. James
Make-up: Jack Young, Fred C. Blau Jr
Titles: Wayne Fitzgerald
Music: Carmine Coppola, Francis Ford Coppola
Master Synthesist: Patrick Gleeson
E.V.I. Soloist Guitarist: Randy Hansen
Percussion Based Score: Mickey Hart
Music Performed by: The Rhythm Devils, Jordan Amarantha, Greg Errico, Zakir Hussain, Billy Kreutzmann, Phil Lesh, Jim Loveless
Playmate Show Choreography: John Calvert
Sound Montage/Design: Walter Murch
Production Recordists: Nathan Boxer, Jack Jacobsen
Re-recordists: Walter Murch, Mark Berger, Richard Beggs, Dale Strumpell, Thomas Scott
Sound Editors: Leslie Hodgson, Les Wiggins, Pat Jackson, Jay Miracle
Creative Consultant: Dennis Jakob
Military Advisers: Dick White, Fred Rexer Jr, Paul Gregory, Lt Colonel Peter Kama (US Army Ret), Paul Hensler, Richard Dioguardi, Doug Ryan
Stunt Co-ordinator: Terry J. Leonard
Cast:
Marlon Brando (*Colonel Walter E. Kurtz*)
Robert Duvall (*Lt Colonel Bill Kilgore*)
Martin Sheen (*Captain Benjamin L. Willard*)
Frederic Forrest (*'Chef' Hicks*)
Albert Hall (*Chief Phillips*)
Sam Bottoms (*Lance B. Johnson*)
Larry Fishburne (*'Clean'*)
Dennis Hopper (*photo journalist*)
G.D. Spradlin (*General Corman*)
Harrison Ford (*Colonel Lucas*)
Jerry Ziesmer (*civilian*)
Scott Glenn (*Captain Richard Colby*)
Bo Byers (*first MP sergeant*)
James Keane (*Kilgore's gunner*)
Kerry Rossall (*Mike from San Diego*)
Ron McQueen (*injured soldier*)
Tom Mason (*supply sergeant*)
Cynthia Wood (*Playmate of the year*)

In the year of its 40th anniversary, Francis Ford Coppola's acid-drenched odyssey to the dark heart of the Vietnam war is returning to the big screen, in what has been billed *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut*. First unveiled at this year's Tribeca Film Festival, Coppola has revisited his most tumescent, complex masterpiece in pursuit of an apparently 'definitive' version. Standing at three hours, some 30 minutes longer than the original 1979 cut, it includes several additional, divergent details, from a botched live appearance by a group of playboy models at a US outpost; to a woozy adventure on a French plantation shortly before the film's final act, in which Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) completes his journey up the Nung River in pursuit of the man whose command he has been dispatched to terminate, Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando).

This is an exercise that Coppola has engaged in before, of course. In 2001, the director revisited *Apocalypse Now* to create what would be billed *Redux*, adding 53 minutes to the original film. *Final Cut*, by contrast, contains nothing new, Coppola instead having culled a few of *Redux*'s additional scenes to create a cut somewhere in-between the previous two. How, then, is this new version more definitive? Coppola himself reflects that when *Apocalypse Now* screened at Cannes in 1979, it was effectively unfinished, with financial pressure and a desire to end the by-now-rampant speculation around the troubled production (many suspected that it would never be finished) driving him to finally deliver the two hour, 20-minute cut that so divided audiences, Palme d'Or or not.

With history having vindicated him – Steven Soderbergh, when speaking to him at Tribeca, told Coppola that 'you gambled, and you won' – Coppola had always felt his 1979 cut was incomplete, speculating that what had once appeared avant-garde could now be pushed further, and for longer. Finally scratching this itch with *Redux*, he was seemingly unable to resist restoring all of the footage available to him, indulging the film's fullest durational possibilities, a kind of *Apocalypse Now Maximus*.

Final Cut is, ultimately, a response to *Redux*. Coppola has dubbed his previous attempt at completism simply 'too long', and this *Final Cut*, in the spirit of Goldilocks, just right. Avoiding much of *Redux*'s narrative sag, its three hour running time feels well matched with the film's own epic sense of scale, and many of the pleasures of 2001's expansion – the stealing of Kilgore's (Robert Duvall) surfboard among them – remain intact; although debate is likely to continue over the French plantation segment, which remains in full. Its strange, tone-shifting descent into what feels like a 19th century timewarp, complete with regal dining, missives about the changing fortunes of French Indochina, and the boudoir in which Willard smokes opium with the compound's matriarch, remains a divergent chapter.

But it's a sequence clearly important to Coppola, touching as it does upon an important facet of the war, namely French involvement. It also deepens the extent to which *Apocalypse Now*, despite its very specific setting, feels divorced from a real sense of time. Instead, Vietnam is experienced as a series of traumatic layers leading towards the final confrontation with Kurtz, a denouement taking place inside a hellish kingdom that almost seems like an ahistorical non-place, somewhere between past and present, or life and death. A metaphysical embellishment of Coppola's original intent, the plantation segment feels more prominent within *Final Cut*'s runtime, another strange additional layer in what was already an episodic film.

Colleen Camp, Linda Carpenter (*Playmates*)
Jack Thibeu (soldier in trench)
Glenn Walken (*Lt Carlsen*)
George Cantero (*soldier with suitcase*)
Damien Leake (*machine gunner*)
Herb Rice (*Roach*)
William Upton (*spotter*)
Larry Carney (*second MP sergeant*)
Marc Coppola (*AFRS announcer*)
Daniel Kiewit (*major from New Jersey*)
Father Elias (*Catholic priest*)
Bill Graham (*agent*)
Hattie James (*voice of 'Clean's mother*)
Jerry Ross (*Johnny from Malibu*)
Dick White (*helicopter pilot*)
the Ifugao people of Banaue Philippine Islands
(*Montagnard tribesmen*)
Vittorio Storaro (*TV cameraman*)*
Dean Tavoularis (*TV crew member*)*
R. Lee Erney (*helicopter pilot*)*
French Plantation Section
Christian Marquand (*Hubert DeMarais*)
Aurore Clément (*Roxanne Sarrault*)
Michel Pitton (*Philippe DeMarais*)
Frank Villard (*Gaston DeMarais*)
David Olivier (*Christian DeMarais*)
Chrystel Le Pelletier (*Claudine*)
Robert Julian (*the tutor*)
Yvon LeSeaux (*Sergeant LeFevre*)
Roman Coppola (*Francis DeMarais*)
Gian-Carlo Coppola (*Gilles DeMarais*)
Henri Sadardiel (*French soldier 1*)
Gilbert Renkens (*French soldier 2*)
USA 1979©
182 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

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Seeing this new version of *Apocalypse Now* inevitably recalls the era of American cinema that followed in the wake of *Easy Rider* (1969). This decade of risk-taking – *Apocalypse Now's* \$30 million budget roughly equates to \$200 million today, with the caveat that Coppola financed much of it himself – is also explicitly bound up in the mythology of the director's cut, exemplified by the film that arguably brought this period of studio-funded auteurism to a dramatic end. Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980), shown once in a 219 minute cut before the disastrous release of a shorter, 149 minute version that disappeared in a flaming ball of ignominy, is best known for torpedoing United Artists. But a screening of its longer incarnation, billed as a 'director's cut', on the influential American television station Channel Z arguably laid the groundwork for the resurrection of films originally butchered by their producers for fear of financial disaster, a list that would come to include Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (1973), Sam Fuller's *The Big Red One* (1980), and Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in America* (1984).

The latter, originally released in America as a (rather awful) two-hour, linear brutalisation foisted upon its director, has eventually been restored to something close to its original elegiac, back-and-forth, four hour masterfulness; while Bertolucci was forced to edit the five-plus hours of his 1976 film *1900* into something roughly half the length, for fear of producers coming up with something even worse. That resulted in the curious circumstance of a director's cut effectively being in circulation at the same time as a shorter theatrical cut, a circumstance recently repeated by the controversial release of truncated versions of Wong Kar Wai's *The Grandmaster* (2013) and Bong Joon Ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013).

The post-*Easy Rider* era of American cinema to which *Apocalypse Now* belongs, running roughly from the late '60s to the early '80s, may have been relatively fortunate in arriving on the eve of audience enthusiasm for a director's true vision (an enthusiasm that has also remained largely fixated on male, American directors, the compromised directorial visions of women and non-white filmmakers yet to receive the same canonisation). Earlier eras of filmmaking are also littered with tales of lost films, often butchered by their studios or producers.

When it comes to this new *Apocalypse Now* perhaps what impresses most is its vitality and boldness, some 40 years later. Led by the extraordinary richness of image and sound in this new, restored version (extracted from the original negative), it remains a staggering visual and aural journey, a trip into America's heart of darkness that feels as relevant to the addled mania of Trump as it does to the Vietnam War. Technology has now opened up a universe of palettes to explore when a film is being remastered. Michael Mann – one of the most worthwhile filmmakers in regularly offering fascinating new versions of his films, while also being openly dismissive of ever revisiting *The Keep* (1983), his most legendarily constrained, compromised work – has often commented on how restoration lets a film exist as much in the present as the past, allowing for a kind of formal rebirth. Seeing this new *Apocalypse Now* on the biggest of screens at Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna earlier this year was a truly extraordinary experience, and it feels like a film that's returned newly alive to us, somehow even more confident in its hallucinatory, kaleidoscopic strangeness than ever before. That is the cut that truly matters.

Andrew Simpson, bfi.org.uk, 13 August 2019