



## Ridley Scott: Building Cinematic Worlds

# The Last Duel

### The Last Duel

*Directed by:* Ridley Scott  
©: Twentieth Century Studios,  
TSG Entertainment Finance LLC  
*Executive Producers:* Kevin Halloran,  
Drew Vinton, Madison Ainley  
*Produced by:* Ridley Scott, Kevin J. Walsh, Jennifer  
Fox, Nicole Holofcener, Matt Damon, Ben Affleck  
*Unit Production Manager:* Kevin Halloran  
*Post-production Supervisor:* Teresa Kelly  
*2nd Unit Director:* Rob Inch  
*1st Assistant Director:* Raymond Kirk  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Dan John  
*Script Supervisor:* Annie Wotton  
*Casting by:* Kate Rhodes James  
*Screenplay by:* Nicole Holofcener,  
Ben Affleck, Matt Damon  
*Based on the book [The Last Duel: A True Story of  
Trial by Combat in Medieval France] by:* Eric Jager  
*Director of Photography:* Dariusz Wolski  
*A Camera/Steadicam Operator:* James Goldman  
*Stills Photography:* Pat Redmond  
*Visual Effects Supervisors:* Gary Brozenich,  
Jessica Norman  
*Visual Effects by:* Mikros, MPC Film, Host VFX  
*Special Effects Supervisor:* Stefano Pepin  
*Edited by:* Claire Simpson  
*Production Designer:* Arthur Max  
*Supervising Art Director:* Cristina Onori  
*Set Decorator:* Jude Farr  
*Costume Designer:* Janty Yates  
*Make-up Supervisor:* Matteo Silvi  
*Hair Designer:* Luca Vannella  
*Main and End Titles Design:* Matt Curtis  
*Colourist:* Stephan Nakamura  
*Colour and Finish by:* Company 3  
*Music by:* Harry Gregson-Williams  
*Conductor:* Harry Gregson-Williams  
*Sound Designer:* Oliver Tarney  
*Sound Mixers:* Daniel Birch, Stéphane Bucher  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Paul Massey,  
David Giammarco, William Miller  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Oliver Tarney  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Rob Inch  
*Fight Co-ordinator:* Troy Milenov  
*Supervising Armourer:* Tim Lewis  
*Horse Master:* Dan Naprous  
*Unit Publicist:* Kate Bowe  
*Cast:*  
Matt Damon (*Sir Jean de Carrouges*)  
Adam Driver (*Jacques Le Gris*)  
Jodie Comer (*Marguerite de Carrouges*)  
Harriet Walter (*Nicole de Carrouges*)  
Zeljko Ivanek (*Le Coq*)  
Márton Csókás (*Crespin*)  
Alex Lawther (*King Charles VI*)  
Ben Affleck (*Count Pierre d'Alençon*)  
William Houston (*herald at the duel*)  
Oliver Cotton (*Jean de Carrouges III*)  
Aurélien Lorgnier (*Carrouges's priest*)  
Nathaniel Parker (*Sir Robert de Thibouville*)  
Tallulah Haddon (*Marie*)  
Bryony Hannah (*Alice*)  
Thomas Silberstein (*Palace of Justice clerk*)  
Adam Goodwin (*rider*)  
Ian Pirie (*Henri*)  
Daniel Horn (*Argentan herald*)  
Michael McElhatton (*Bernard de Latour*)  
Sam Hazeldine (*Thomin Dubois*)  
Clive Russell, Julian Firth (*King's uncles*)  
Sylvian Lablee (*Palace of Justice bailiff*)  
Zoé Bruneau (*Lady Marie Chamailart*)  
Chloe Lindau (*Pierre's mistress*)

A concern for truth lies at the heart of Sir Ridley Scott's new epic film *The Last Duel* and it follows a thin red line connecting all his period films from *The Duellists* (1977) to *Robin Hood* (2010). Whether it is truth versus legend (who was Robin Hood really?) or versus historical fact (who was Christopher Columbus really?), Scott's historical films have relentlessly interrogated the past, at once alert for contemporary parallels while respecting the pastness of the past – the difference of it. *The Last Duel* is one of his most successful ventures: nuanced yet large in scale, complex yet direct, brutal and exciting while astutely noting that the devil is often in the detail.

The film begins in 1386. Two men are to face off in a trial by combat to ascertain who is right in the argument. The men are Jean de Carrouges, played by a bulky mullet-adorning Matt Damon; the other is the feline Jacques Le Gris, played with spectacular panache and flourish by the constantly great Adam Driver. The argument revolves around the alleged rape involving Jean's wife Marguerite (Jodie Comer), who Jacques is accused of assaulting. Under the eyes of the pubescent Charles VI (Alex Lawther), the men don their armour, take their lances and thunder towards each other on horseback, before Scott perpetrates what can only be described as *duellum interruptus*, presenting the rest of the film as three flashbacks: each telling the version of the story from the point of view of one of the protagonists. So far, so *Rashomon*.

Daringly, Scott and the screenwriters – Damon, Affleck and Nicole Holofcener – have taken each chapter almost as if they were different films, with each screenwriter adopting the viewpoint of an individual character. And Scott has filmed them in subtly different ways, not simply as conflicting versions of the facts, but as different genres.

So we begin with Jean de Carrouges's version as a typical soldier's tale, full of fights and bloodshed. Jean is a Ridley Scott hero: the honest man of violence, slighted by the local noble Pierre (Ben Affleck) and betrayed by his friend Jacques, whose life he saved in battle. He is awkward in romance, his relationship with Marguerite tender and clumsy. Jacques, on the other hand, believes he saved Jean's life. He pities his friend even as his own career takes off due to his talent and the admiration of Count Pierre. Whereas Jean's chapter is stolid and humourless, Jacques's is witty and fun. An epicure, he places what has passed between him and Marguerite within a courtly tradition of lovemaking. On being accused of rape, he is genuinely shocked, like a rock star accused by a groupie: Marguerite, he says, made 'the customary protestations', because she's a lady, but this was not rape.

The final chapter is Marguerite's version. She sees Jean as a man who on their wedding day is more concerned with her dowry than with her. She is proud of her husband, something she repeatedly tells him, understanding the fragility of his ego; in return, she is marginalised and demeaned by him. Yes, she is attracted to Jacques, as she admits to her friend Celia (Clare Dunne), but this is not an invitation. And her no means no. It is not a 'customary protestation'.

In one sense, Scott's film feels like something of a summation of his career: a return to Ridley country, which despite existing across many periods retains a consistent atmosphere. The snow tends to blow sideways; there is palpable grime and wood smoke. In the mud-coloured landscape, the one thing that can be relied on to provide a ruby-red dash of colour is gouts of blood. Overall, there is the deep pessimism of a disappointed romantic. As Gene Hackman's detective says in Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* (1975): 'No one is winning; just one team is losing slower.'

Adam Nagaitis (*Adam Louvel*)  
Elise Caprice, Fiona Maherault Valinski,  
Tassia Martin, Camille Mutin (*women at orgy*)  
Caoimhe O'Malley (*Elizabeth*)  
John Kavanagh (*Le Gris' priest*)  
Simone Collins (*Agatha*)  
Clare Dunne (*Celia*)  
Christian Erickson (*Louis the old farmer*)  
Alex Blanchard (*tailor*)  
Gin Minelli, Cecilia Steiner (*noble ladies*)  
Serena Kennedy (*Queen Isabeau*)  
Quentin Ogier, Paul Bandey, Martin Vaughan Lewis  
(*clergy*)  
Brontis Jodorowsky, Peter Hudson (*magistrates*)  
Alexander Pattie (*Sergeant at Arms*)  
Dimitri Michelsen (*treasury bureaucrat*)  
Stephen Brennan (*physician*)  
Colin David Reese (*Carrouges' gate keeper*)  
Bosco Hogan (*priest at duel*)  
Kyle Hixon (*Pierre's tailor*)  
Florian Hutter (*dowry lawyer*)  
Sam Chemoul (*teenager Carrouges' estate*)  
Jim Roche, Martin Gogarty, Ronan Leonard,  
Shane Lynch, Peter Kirkby (*orgy spectators*)  
Kevin McGahern (*clueless vassal*)  
Lorris Chevalier (*singing soldier*)  
USA-UK 2021©  
153 mins  
Digital 4K

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And yet this also feels like a daring departure for the 83-year-old filmmaker and his collaborators. His storytelling delights in picking out the detailed differences in each version: some trivial, some comic, some tragic. As for the performances, Matt Damon bravely takes to pieces his own likeable version of male heroics, and Driver, following his role in Leos Carax's *Annette* earlier this year, again engages his charisma in the service of something dark. Affleck cheekily nabs some of the best lines for himself, in a turn that adds some camp irony to the piece. But it is Comer who is the hero, playing two versions of herself as men see her before finally finding her own voice.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, December 2021

A filmmaker celebrated for his distinct visual flair and cinematic eye, Ridley Scott is known for his spectacular 360 filmmaking, employing multiple cameras for each scene. 'Ridley really understands light and how to frame a shot at a very, very exceptionally advanced level,' says Matt Damon. 'And yes, he came in as art director, but doing live TV and operating a camera is also what really informs a lot of the way he directs. He knows how to stage a scene, physically.'

Scott is one of a handful of directors working today who edits the film during principal photography. In explaining his unique work dynamic Damon says, 'When Ridley is setting his cameras in the trailer he will walk out on to the floor, rehearse a scene, and set four cameras, and Dariusz [Wolski] will light them. Then he goes into the truck and looks at those cameras as if he was operating them, which is just a more elaborate version of what he started out doing. You know what a shot is and you know how to find it and how to set it up...he just does that with four cameras, and he has four professional operators on walkie-talkies adjusting the shot, and that's your shot right there.'

'It was really exciting for me to see Ridley's very distinctive shooting style, which involves multiple cameras capturing all of the action in two parts, but it feels simultaneous,' says Ben Affleck. 'There was an incredible amount of energy present depending on where the cameras were pointing. You didn't know when you were going to be on camera and when you weren't, which created a sense of urgency and immediacy that was really great.'

To help visually convey the brutal and gritty nature of a colourful world steeped in tradition and fanfare, Scott looked to acclaimed cinematographer Dariusz Wolski, with whom he has worked on five films (beginning with *Prometheus* in 2012), to man the cameras.

For Wolski, one of the biggest challenges on *The Last Duel* was fabricating natural light for scenes being shot inside the mostly dark and often windowless castles. The castle's moats and 100-foot walls were built to prevent access, which made his job all the more difficult.

'On location in France we were very limited... we could not put a lot of light on the castle windows so we used existing exposure from outside the windows,' Wolski says. 'But we were constrained by relocation, which means we could not put big lights outside the window because there was a huge wall or something similar that prevented it.'

The question then became how to balance it inside. 'It depends on whether you want to see a silhouette or somebody's face or somebody's eyes,' Wolski explains. 'Once we see how the actors' placing plays, and if it plays dramatically, we base our decision on that.'

Production notes