

# Making Apocalypse Now

*Episode 4: Beginning with 'The End'*



## Forward

By **CINEMATYLER**

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Thanks so much for your support! Making these has taken a lot of work, but because of your support I will be able to get some editing help for the next episode! I've been a fan of The Doors since middle school and had always looked up to Jim Morrison as a unique and soulful artist. It is so strange to look back at Morrison from my 30s and see someone who was still just a kid when he died. It's amazing to see the legacy of The Doors is still going strong.

Francis Ford Coppola and John Milius always had The Doors in mind while working on Apocalypse Now. Milius once said that he thought of the music

of The Doors as the music of war, which I found bizarre. After making this episode, I can begin to see how the music gets to a deeper level of the psyche in which, we can confront the very nature of war and what it is to be human. Perhaps 'The End' is the best example of this, but still, I can't think of a better way to begin a movie titled Apocalypse Now. \*



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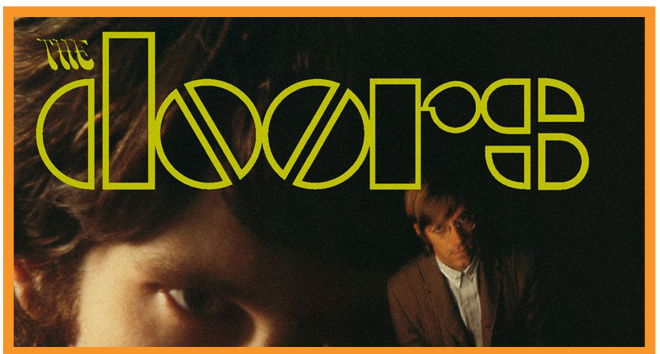
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# CHARACTERS



## Francis Ford Coppola:

The Hero. A director coming off the massive success of *The Conversation* and *The Godfather* parts I and II is about to embark on a journey that will test his limits—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Will he change the film industry? Will he survive?



## Jim Morrison (*The Doors*):

The Poet. The spirit of the '60s, known by Coppola and Milius—Morrison's poetry would bring the soul to the film's opening and climax.



## Walter Murch (Editor):

The Wizard. His unique editing process would use an experimental approach to Willard's introduction by bringing us into the mind of a struggling soul and showing us how "The End" is built into the beginning.



## John Milius (Screenwriter):

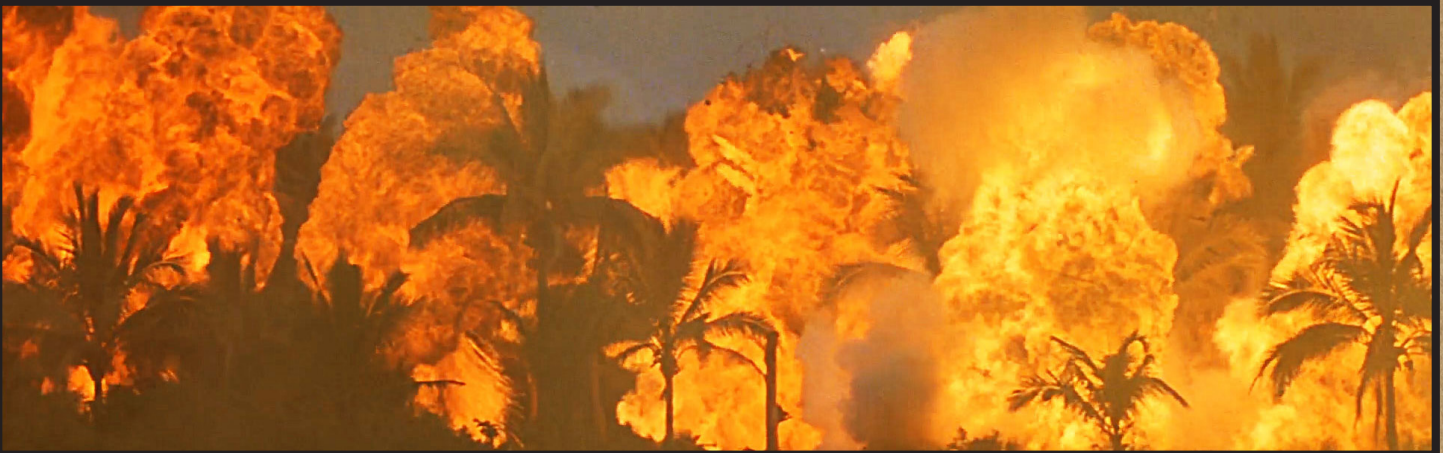
The Renegade. His bold and sometimes far-out ideas give insight into where his visions of Kurtz and his army came from and how the character evolved over time.



# The End.

## ALL THE CHILDREN ARE INSANE

In this episode, we took a look at the connections between Jim Morrison and *Apocalypse Now*. What follows is some more detail on Jim Morrison and how important he and The Doors were to the atmosphere and psyche of *Apocalypse Now*'s depiction of war.



August 2nd, 1964, saw the beginning of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War after a destroyer named the USS Maddox battled three North Vietnamese torpedo boats, killing four and wounding six Viet Cong soldiers. The U.S. suffered no injuries — only “minimal damage to the American boats and planes.”<sup>1</sup> It is widely thought that President Johnson intentionally provoked the battle to escalate the conflict, giving the US justification to enter the war.<sup>1</sup>

As we discussed in the episode, father of Doors frontman Jim Morrison, Admiral George Stephen Morrison, was in command of the US Navy during this battle, which would bring the US into a war that would end with “38,000 Americans and more than a million Vietnamese” deaths.<sup>1</sup> George Morrison had been a World War II fighter pilot

and was training in Pensacola, Florida when Jim was born in 1943.<sup>1</sup> After the war, the family was stationed in Washington DC until George was transferred to “New Mexico to work as an instructor at an atomic weapons facility.”<sup>1</sup> On the family road trip to their new home, they came across an overturned truck with dying Pueblo Native Americans strewn about the street waiting for help— the four-year-old Jim witnessed this and famously believed he saw the soul of one of the dying Native Americans enter his body and become a permanent part of him.

This was dramatized in Oliver Stone's biopic titled *The Doors* and the Native American even appears with Morrison on stage during one of the film's concert scenes.



# Jim Morrison

## THE DOORS



Jim Morrison would grow up a lover of literature, reading everything he could get his hands on. It has been speculated that Morrison had a photographic memory and he would often complete random passages from books recited to him by friends.<sup>1</sup>

In 1964, Morrison transferred to UCLA film school and got a part-time job at Powell Library to help earn money for books.<sup>2</sup> During this time, UCLA was more theory-based than

USC, which mainly focused on working in the industry rather than fully exploring the medium. UCLA students were interested in “auteurism, French New Wave cinema, avant-garde movies, and underground and experimental films.”<sup>2</sup> At UCLA, Morrison met Ray Manzarek, a law-school dropout, who recently transferred to the film program.<sup>1</sup> Manzarek had a lot of ideas about film and loved the work of Bergman and Antonioni. He would end up fighting the school’s censorship



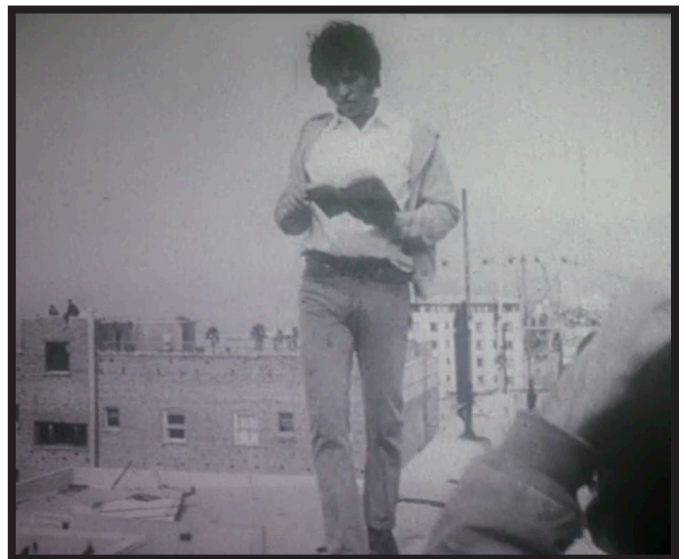
# Jim Morrison

## THE DOORS

of his short films—refusing to modify them to please the faculty.<sup>1</sup>

Morrison worked on several projects at UCLA, including re-editing footage of couples' massage from the psychology department in order to look pornographic, which caused quite a stir, especially from faculty.<sup>1</sup> Another titled "First Love" was eventually released to the public as part of a documentary about a film titled *Obscura*.<sup>3</sup> The mantra of the students there was, "dreams beget reality," in that "life was not as romantic as they wanted it to be, so they set out to portray it according to their vision on film."<sup>1</sup>

Morrison filled his projects with themes of Jung, Freud, and Nietzsche, writing, "the appeal of cinema is the fear of death."<sup>1</sup> The theme of death as something that needn't be feared likely stems from his witnessing the death of the Pueblo Native American and this obsession with death would carry from his flirtations with death. This includes such flirtations as nearly killing himself and his siblings on a fast-moving sled when he was twelve, to walking the edges of rooftops, to such great Doors hits as *Break on Through (To the Other Side)*.



PSA: Look up from your book once in a while to make sure you're not about to fall off a building.



# Jim Morrison

## THE DOORS

Morrison found a kinship with a film instructor named Ed Brokaw, who liked Jim's outrageousness and, in May 1965, Morrison would screen his short film along with fifty other students.<sup>1</sup> We see this play out in Stone's film as Morrison experiences a public humiliation when the students — mostly fans of Truffaut and Andy Warhol — rejected his bizarre and divisive style. By the way, Stone himself plays a UCLA professor in the film who is likely meant to be Brokaw.



*The face of a professor who has just watched 50 student films.*

*television show Outer Limits, cuts into the film's crew smoking cigarettes and theoretically getting ready to film a stag movie. Then hand puppets and Playboy centerfolds appear over Navajo chants. Then darts are thrown at the centerfolds. A woman disappears into an elevator. Morrison puffs from a joint, then an atomic bomb explodes while he winks to the camera. Then Elke, in bra, panties, garter belt and stockings, parodies the Blue Angel dancing on top of a TV, images from the set seeming to emanate from between her legs. Then the TV show Victory at Sea morphs with Nazi storm tempers. Themes include masturbation, and eyeball licking, meant to represent the cleansing of one's sight after having viewed pornography or obscenity.<sup>1</sup>*

The students hated it and Brokaw reportedly said, "Jim, I'm terribly disappointed in you."<sup>1</sup> Some who were there say that they saw Morrison cry and become defensive. Morrison, who had always been a good student, received a D on the project.<sup>1</sup>

In his book, Stephen Travers explains Morrison's film:

*... a fuzzy test-pattern, like the one from the*

# Jim Morrison

## THE DOORS

During college, Morrison had been a regular at a place called the Whisky a Go Go in West Hollywood, a venue that helped launch the careers of bands like Led Zeppelin, The Byrds, and Buffalo Springfield.<sup>4</sup> The Doors would eventually open for Van Morrison at the venue.<sup>4</sup>

Fast forward to 1967, when the band recorded a 12-minute song titled *The End*. Apparently, Morrison originally wrote the lyrics about breaking up with a girlfriend named Mary Werbelow, but Morrison said, “It just started out

According to Rolling Stone, the song evolved during the band’s time at Whisky a Go Go, in which, one night, Morrison dropped acid and improvised the final part of the song.<sup>6</sup> Whiskey a Go Go fired the band after this incident.<sup>6</sup> The song was recorded live twice for the band’s first album with the second take being the one we’ve come to know.<sup>7</sup>



as a simple goodbye song... Probably just to a girl, but I could see how it could be goodbye to a kind of childhood... I think it’s sufficiently complex and universal in its imagery that it could be almost anything you want it to be.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it could be about Vietnam?

Many have interpreted the lyrics to be about the loss of innocence similar to the end of Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* where hundreds of barely-legal recruits march through a burning city singing the Micky Mouse Club theme song.



*The Doors at Whisky a Go Go (1966)*



# Jim Morrison

## THE DOORS

.....

In an article for HuffPost, Nick Turse describes how the lyrics can be linked to America's involvement in the Vietnam War. He writes:

**“Of our elaborate plans, the end...”**

*Forged in the fading afterglow of World War II, America's plans for a righteous nation to save a backward people were elaborate indeed. To Washington, the Vietnamese seemed to be “Desperately in need of some stranger's hand.”<sup>5</sup>*

**“In a desperate land...”**

*America's moral superiority, its ingenuity, its technological know-how, its military might were unstoppable; with a requisite number of quislings in tow, the fall of those Southeast Asian dominos would be arrested, communism would be stopped, and a Cold War battle won.<sup>5</sup>*

.....

Morrison said, "Sometimes the pain is too much to examine, or even tolerate ... That doesn't make it evil, though – or necessarily dangerous. But people fear death even more than pain. It's strange that they fear death. Life hurts a lot more than death. At the point of death, the pain is over. Yeah – I guess it is a friend."<sup>7</sup>

Morrison would die of an overdose in 1971, never seeing the end of the war his father helped bring the U.S. into. It would be nearly a decade later when former schoolmate Francis Ford Coppola would use *The End* to both open and close *Apocalypse Now*— a film about (among other things) a loss of childhood innocence.



*Inception Metaphor = When a metaphor is inside the jacket of the same metaphor.*



# Jim Morrison

## THE DOORS

The version of the song that opens and closes *Apocalypse Now* is not the same mix as the one on the album—the part where Morrison repeats “fuck” over and over was essentially buried in the original mix. This appears prominently in the mix for *Apocalypse Now* because, when editor Walter Murch requested the song from the record company, “the studio unknowingly sent him the original master tracks to use, which explains the different (some would say better) sonic quality of the song used in the film.”<sup>7</sup>

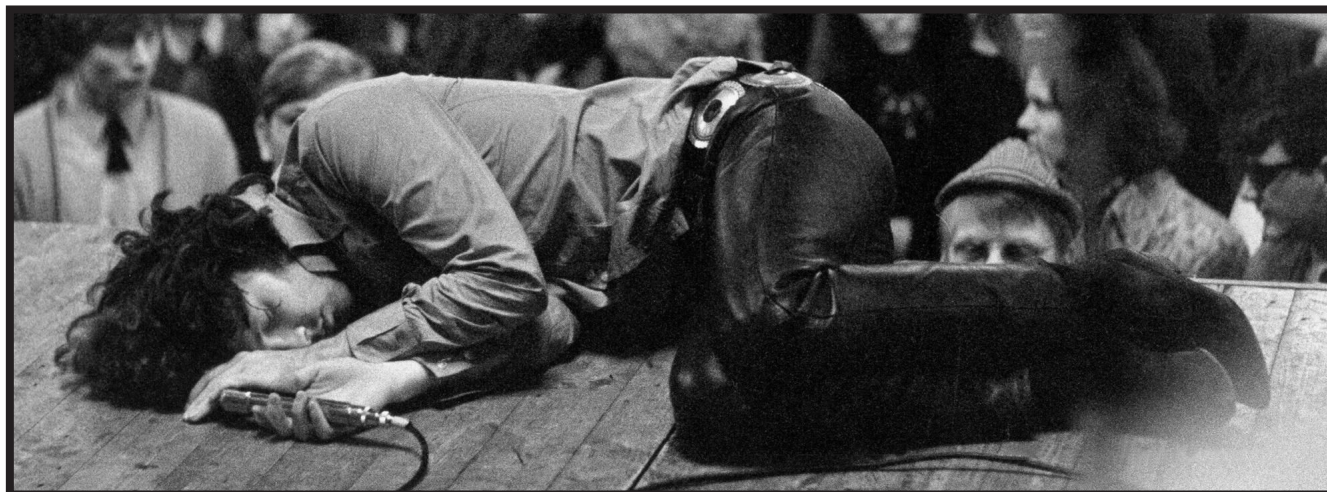
The “fucks” in this section are most likely part of Morrison’s reference to the story of Oedipus where he says, “Father / Yes son? / I want to kill you / Mother, I want to ...’ (with the next words screamed out unintelligibly).”<sup>7</sup>

Doors’ drummer John Densmore wrote about the recording session in his autobiography. He said,

*At one point Jim said to me during the recording session, and he was tearful, and he shouted in the studio, ‘Does anybody understand me?’ And I said yes, I do, and right then and there we got into a*

*long discussion and Jim just kept saying over and over kill the father, fuck the mother, and essentially boils down to this, kill all those things in yourself which are instilled in you and are not of yourself, they are alien concepts which are not yours, they must die. Fuck the mother is very basic, and it means get back to essence, what is reality, what is, fuck the mother is very basically mother, mother-birth, real, you can touch it, it’s nature, it can’t lie to you. So what Jim says at the end of the Oedipus section, which is essentially the same thing that the classic says, kill the alien concepts, get back reality, the end of alien concepts, the beginning of personal concepts.<sup>7</sup>*

*The End* would be the last song the band would perform live before Morrison’s death in 1971.\*



*This is the end...*



# Selected Quotes

## THE APOCALYPSE NOW BOOK BY PETER COWIE

*These quotes can be found in The Apocalypse Now Book by Peter Cowie and expand on some of the events surrounding the use of 'The End' in Apocalypse Now.*

### The Doors

Editor Walter Murch:

“The Doors were intended to score the entire film — or at least songs they had pre-recorded, because Jim Morrison was long dead. We tried many, many songs, but anything we put on the film seemed to be so apt that it was wrong, it hit the nail so firmly on the head that it seemed sophomoric. There was no connection other than a very deep bond between the psyche of Jim Morrison and the psyche of this film.”<sup>8</sup>

### The Opening Shot

Editor Walter Murch:

“There was camera number 6, which was a telephoto lens on a slow-motion camera, photographing the napalm drop that Kilgore calls in, in order to exfoliate the jungle, so that his men can surf. So this was shot for a different context. And yet when Francis saw this in the editing room, there was something mysterious and profoundly true about it — the green wall of the jungle that suddenly turns into flame became for him emblematic of the whole Vietnamese experience.”<sup>8</sup>

### The End

Editor Walter Murch:

“and yet there are images at the beginning that forecast the end, so it's telegraphic in a sense. That's the only holdover of something [using The Doors throughout the picture] that was more thoroughly investigated in several cuts of the film, but it became so predictable, purely by chance, that we decided not to overstate the case. I remember vividly the moment when I made the connection between the sound of the helicopter rotors and visual of the fan. Willard was filmed upside down like that originally. The shot of the Buddha at the right of frame was part of the idea of forecasting the end at the beginning.”<sup>8</sup>

Soundman Richard Beggs put 'The End' over the opening sequence. He said,

“They sent me the four-track... a direct copy of the original master they had made for the song, and in that version Morrison kept saying 'Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me!' but it was never in the album, so I incorporated it into the picture. It was like finding some buried treasure!”<sup>8</sup>



# Selected Quotes

## THE APOCALYPSE NOW BOOK BY PETER COWIE

### Light My Fire

In a conversation with Marlon Brando, Coppola said,

“They were all totally... dope, cocaine, hashish, uncut heroin, marijuana. And not only that, music, Marlon, they fought this war to ‘Light My Fire’. They had loudspeakers, this is true, they had loudspeakers and they would play acid rock and roll during the battles and be stoned on dope when the flares went across the sky... I mean, it was the most absurd war that has ever been fought and I want to get that imagery. Can you imagine playing ‘Light My Fire’ on loudspeakers as the enemy is approaching?...”<sup>9</sup>

Memo by Coppola:

“Generally, take the psychedelics of the movie and use them in Do Lung Bridge. In other words, if it’s not possible to use ‘Light My Fire’ in some kind of cathartic way at the end of the movie, move it over to Do Lung Bridge sequence where they are using loudspeakers.”<sup>10</sup>

### When the Music’s Over...

“CUT:

Dancing by night as the Ifugao clap their hands and dance and chant. On the soundtrack we hear one of The Doors’ most haunting lyrics: ‘We want the world and we want it now. So when the music’s over, turn out the lights.’ Willard kills his guard with a spear as a cow is burned. Then he dispatches more bodyguards, his face already looking more like Kurtz’s.”<sup>11</sup>



# Songs of the Apocalypse

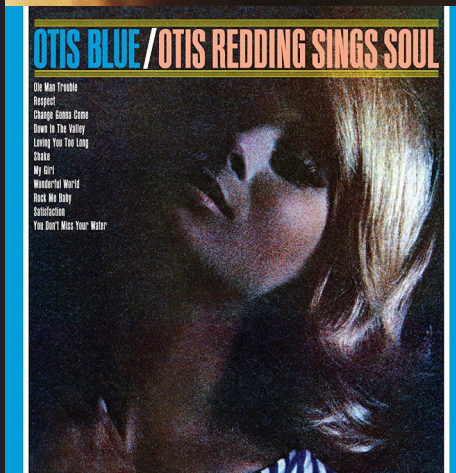
In April 1976, producer Fred Roos put together a list of songs that were either written into the script or that Coppola listed to potentially be used in the film. These are the songs that didn't make the cut. (Cowie, Pgs 101, 102)

Spotify Playlist: <https://spoti.fi/38rIOuN>



## The Doors - Self Titled

- Light My Fire
- Break on Through (To the Other Side)



## Otis Redding - Otis Blue

- (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction

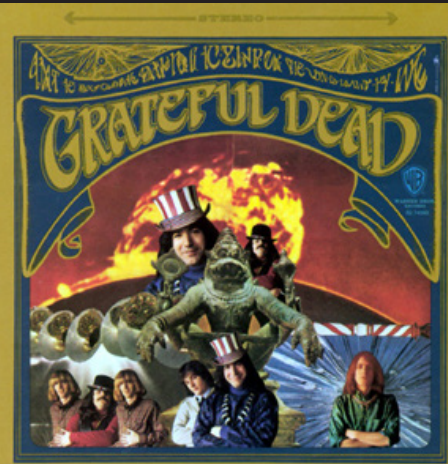
\*The Rolling Stones version did appear in the film.



## Grateful Dead - Aoxomoxoa

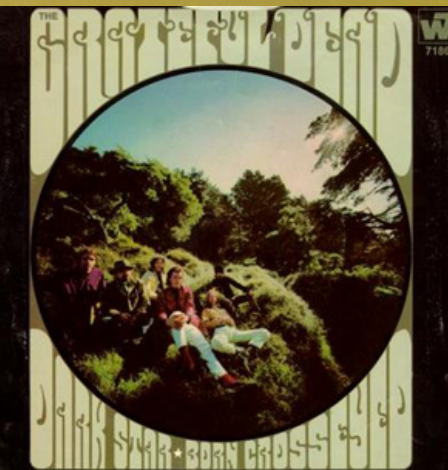
- St Stephen





## Grateful Dead - Self Titled

- Morning Dew



## Grateful Dead - Dark Star (single)

- Dark Star



## Led Zeppelin - II

- Whole Lotta Love



## Van Morrison - Brown Eyed Girl (Single)

- Brown Eyed Girl





## **Jefferson Airplane - Surrealistic Pillow**

- White Rabbit



## **Santana - Self-Titled**

- Soul Sacrifice



## **Cream - Disraeli Gears**

- Sunshine of Your Love



## **Cream - Wheels of Fire**

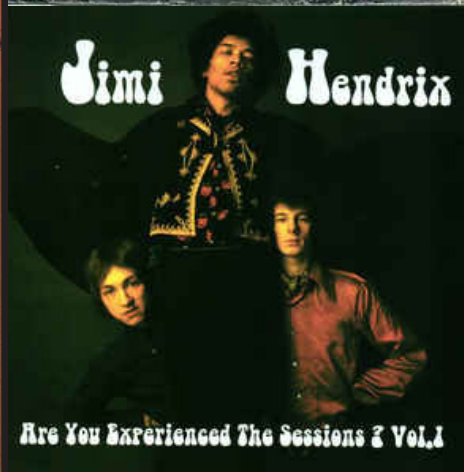
- White Room





## **Jimi Hendrix Experience - Purple Haze (single)**

- Purple Haze



## **Jimi Hendrix Experience - Are You Experienced**

- Foxey Lady

*Spotify Playlist: <https://spoti.fi/38rIOuN>*



# Selected Comments

## APOCALYPSE NOW



Guy Incognito

Thank you for another great essay! As a side note, securing Australia was probably never going to happen: the actor's union was quite possibly serious about their position (although they may have accepted the idea of paid-to-not-be-seen roles), and the Queensland Government (where they had hoped to shoot) was extremely conservative and pro-american, and pro-Vietnam war (even after it was lost, and Australian conscripts had walked off the job). As to Marcos, you have to wonder if Coppola didn't bribe him personally...?



T A

Just subscribed and loving the videos. Ever watched Mel Gibson's Apocalypto? It's not much talked about because of the controversy surrounding the director I guess, but the great attention to detail and the awesome cinematography by Dean Semler shooting with digital Panavision genesis camera system through dense forest makes it a modern day masterpiece.

**CinemaTyler:** I haven't seen it in such a long time, but I remember it being enthralling. It's funny that you mention the camera because Apocalypto came out when I was working for a video store and we used to argue endlessly over whether it was shot on film or not. I remember my main complaint being that the frame-rate seemed too high in parts and looked like it was shot with a video camera and then other parts looked incredible. It definitely deserves a re-watch.



# Selected Comments

## APOCALYPSE NOW



MilesBellas

United Artists was killed by Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*....."Michael Cimino had just come fresh off Academy Award success with the masterful *The Deer Hunter*, and so studios were keen to invest in his projects, given his confident ability to craft complex, epic cinema. His next work was the highly ambitious western *Heaven's Gate*, starring Kris Kristofferson and Christopher Walken, which is noted for its troubled production history, such as Cimino's dictatorial mood on set, and the fact that the production ran wildly over both the allotted time and budget. The four-hour epic - later trimmed to 149 minutes - was a box office bomb, making only \$3.4 million against a whopping \$44 million budget, and causing distributor United Artists to post massive losses solely because of this. UA was rendered bankrupt by the film, causing the studio to cut their production schedule down hugely, while being saved by a merger with MGM. UA only returned to its former glory when Tom Cruise resurrected it back in 2006. "

"Cimino shot more than 1.3 million feet (400,000 metres; nearly 220 hours) of footage, costing the studio approximately \$200,000 per day in salary, locations and acting fees. Privately, it was said Cimino wished to surpass Francis Ford Coppola's mark of shooting one million feet of footage for *Apocalypse Now* (1979)."

**CinemaTyler:** Thanks for the info! Looks like this is from the WhatCulture article (<https://bit.ly/2RInQ49>). I definitely plan on talking about the end of the New Hollywood movement in this series and *Heaven's Gate* was a big part of that. It appears that Cimino carried the spirit of Coppola and *Apocalypse Now* to a bad place. It's hard to say if the movement would have carried on even if the movie was decently successful.

# Selected Comments

## APOCALYPSE NOW



Alien Soup

Coppola's attitude toward financing and production, and his tribulations, have a lot in common with Terry Gilliam's. They both sort of just duck their head down and start running forward.

**CinemaTyler:** Good point! It's such a shame how many problems Coppola and Gilliam had getting their films made. Makes you wonder what it would have been like if Kickstarter or IndieGoGo had been around during their heyday.



yes

Saw the Final Cut in theaters. The best movie I've seen in a theater! Would recommend to every movie-lover.



indobleh

Jeezuz! The making of Apocalypse Now from the logistical human perspective is an incredible story even in 2019-- 40 years after The Heart of Darkness is still pulling the strings!!! Literally half the cast is dead! What came out of this is a masterpiece a timeless classic!

**CinemaTyler:** I love Hearts of Darkness, but so much is missing. I hope I can manage to move away from HoD's point-of-view that the story is about a man with an ego so big that he would risk everything and frame it as the very definition of the independent spirit that will, one day, save the soul of movies.



# SOURCES

## Endnotes

- 1 *Coppola's Monster Film: The Making of Apocalypse Now* by Stephen Travers (Pg 41-48)
- 2 *Jim Morrison: Life, Death, Legend* by Stephen Davis (Pg 47-48)
- 3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Morrison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Morrison)
- 4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whisky\\_a\\_Go\\_Go](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whisky_a_Go_Go)
- 5 Jim Morrison's War Today by Nick Turse  
([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jim-morrison-war-today\\_b\\_7152650](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jim-morrison-war-today_b_7152650))
- 6 25 Songs That Are Truly Terrifying - Rolling Stone  
(<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/25-songs-that-are-truly-terrifying-110099/the-doors-the-end-1967-113452/>)
- 7 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_End\\_\(The\\_Doors\\_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_End_(The_Doors_song))
- 8 *The Apocalypse Now Book* by Peter Cowie (Pg 100, 101)
- 9 *The Apocalypse Now Book* by Peter Cowie (Pg 28)
- 10 *The Apocalypse Now Book* by Peter Cowie (Pg 70)
- 11 *The Apocalypse Now Book* by Peter Cowie (Pg 139)

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