



PREVIEW & EVENTS

Zardoz

Zardoz

Directed by: John Boorman

©: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Produced by: John Boorman

Associate Producer: Charles Orme

Production Manager: Seamus Byrne

Assistant Director: Simon Relf

2nd Assistant Director: Redmond Morris

Continuity: Jean Skinner

Casting: Miriam Brickman

Written by: John Boorman

Design and Story Associate: Bill Stair

Photographed by: Geoffrey Unsworth

Camera Operator: Peter MacDonald

Assistant Cameraman: John Campbell

Electrical Supervisor: Jack Conroy

Grip: Paddy Keogh

Special Effects: Gerry Johnson

Process Projection Effects: Charles Staffell

Special Projection Material: Robin Hughes

Inflatables by: Air Structures Design London

Editor: John Merritt

Electrical Supervisor: Alan Jones

Production Designer: Anthony Pratt

Assistant Designer: Reginald Bream

Assistant Art Director: Martin Atkinson

Set Decorator: John Hoesli

Construction Manager: Peter McGoldrick

Costumes by: Christel Kruse Boorman

Wardrobe Master: Jack Gallagher

Make-up: Basil Newall

Hair Stylist: Colin Jamison

Music by: David Munrow

Sound Mixer: Liam Saurin

Dubbing Mixer: Doug Turner

Sound Editor: Jim Atkinson

Horse Master: Austin Gaskin

Studio: Ardmore Studios

Cast:

Sean Connery (*Zed*)

Charlotte Rampling (*Consuella*)

Sara Kestelman (*May*)

John Alderton (*Friend*)

Sally Anne Newton (*Avalow*)

Niall Buggy (*Arthur Frayn*)

Bosco Hogan (*George Saden*)

Jessica Swift (*Apathetic*)

Bairbre Dowling (*Star*)

Christopher Casson (*old scientist*)

Reginald Jarman (*death*)

John Boorman (*a brutal shot by Zed*) *

David De Keyser (*voice of Tabernacle*) *

UK 1973©

105 mins

Digital 4K

* Uncredited

Courtesy of Park Circus

+ Q&A with writer-director John Boorman

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

The head is a ferocious Greek mask, hacked from stone, its eyes fixed in a malevolent, glittering stare. Monstrous and impossible, it sinks out of the clouds to settle upon a raw and ugly landscape where tiny savage figures gallop to the welcome. A voice resonant with self-importance booms from the snarling mouth, instructing the followers of Zardoz to kill all lesser beings; the words are reinforced by a gush of weapons from between the gigantic stone teeth, and sabres, rifles and ammunition rain down over the eager horsemen. One of them snatches up a pistol, spins triumphantly to face us, and is briefly recognisable as Sean Connery before the crash of the shot extinguishes our vision in a black flood. The year is 2293, the time has come (as Eliot promised) to murder and create, and a magic lantern throws the nerves in patterns on a screen.

After *Deliverance*, nobody can expect a film by John Boorman to be a comfortable experience; even so, *Zardoz* has its audience out for the count before the credits are through. The opening scene, a blasphemous compilation of the incredible and the familiar, threatens to overbalance at any moment from its outrageous tightrope and plunge into the ridiculous – but Boorman, acrobat as well as clown, has prepared the Fall in every detail. Accept the massive stone scowl at, as it were, face value, and it's as plausible as any other totem; reject it, and anti-gravity devices are at hand. The whole thing is an ingenious sham, and it's no great disaster if we glimpse a few strings. They lead us into a labyrinth of myths, memories and meanings where a truth can be unravelled that is as simple or as elusive as we care to make it. In its direct assault upon our security, the gunshot at the audience is both an insult and a release; kept at pistol's length from the character with whom we would otherwise identify, we are free to question and to evaluate everything he does. We rely on him to lead the way but we are disinclined to trust him. Which is, as it turns out, just as well – for even in the case of this seemingly arbitrary example of homicidal potency, some very long strings indeed are being pulled.

Unquestioning as Bradbury's fireman in *Fahrenheit 451*, Zed the Exterminator obeys the demands of Zardoz the God until, like Montag and many another rebel of the future, he turns a page or two and realises that there are alternatives. Pistol in hand, he stows away in the mouth of the flying sculpture and is carried to the Vortex, a brilliant oasis of indolent intelligence where the Eternals live in immortal boredom and sterility, their petulant misdemeanours punished by senility, their occasional suicides by prompt resurrection. Fascinated by Zed, they argue over his fate; one group, headed by Consuella (Charlotte Rampling) wants him destroyed, while another, headed by May (Sara Kestelman), insists that he should be studied for a while. During the contest that follows, Zed acquires an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Vortex and its purpose, confronts the forces that enclose it, and restores to its delighted, centuries-old inhabitants the ability to remain dead when they die. The process of evolution is released once more, and the natural history of man can resume its course.

The story is Boorman's own, but science fiction holds honourable precedents for it. The ashen wastes of the Outlands, where the Exterminators in their frowning Zardoz helmets ride in pursuit of the Brutals (shabbily suited like tired businessmen), have been the familiar setting for many a disaster novel in which the atomic war has come and gone or the planet's resources have at last expired. The Vortex, smugly enclosed within its force shield, is like many a glowing citadel awaiting a sword-and-sorcery Hero to breach its walls, cutting

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Thu 26 Sep 18:10

Funday Workshop: Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit

Sun 29 Sep 10:30

Funday: Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit + intro by Nick Park and Merlin Crossingham

Sun 29 Sep 12:00

Nick Park and Merlin Crossingham in Conversation

Sun 29 Sep 14:15

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through the ranks of defenders and the pages of swashbuckle until foolishly tapped on the back of the neck at the moment of victory. Science fiction, too, has many times sent generations of space pioneers on a journey so immense that its purpose is forgotten until, at the last moment, balance is restored by the response to pre-set stimuli.

As usual, Boorman keeps up a headlong pace to avoid being crushed by the weight of his argument, and as with *Leo the Last* one suspects that now and again it's a close thing. The narrative of *Zardoz* is carefully dislocated, a dazzling show of conjury that darts between Zed's current predicament and the steps which brought him to it (recalled either on a screen through the Vortex memory banks, or in flashback with the loving assistance of May). Like Zed, we are gradually made aware, in vivid glimpses, of the intolerable plight of the Eternals, some of whom, the Apathetics, have degenerated into almost total immobility, while others, the Renegades, suffer the terrible punishment of endless old age for having dared to complain. Zed slowly fits the pieces together, his energy supplemented by the various contributions of the Eternals themselves, their personalities (like, in a sense, those of the quartet in *Deliverance*) merging to form a single sum of knowledge. In a delightful sequence of lights and colours, Zed is instructed in the range of facts and experiences held by the women of the Vortex, as they in turn draw life from him. Finally he is equipped with the gifts that will enable him to converse with the Tabernacle, which controls the secrets of the Vortex; all evidence assembled, the audience is prepared for Boorman's major showpiece – Zed's battle inside the 'storage space for refracted light patterns', the diamond containing the Tabernacle itself.

Well, perhaps the audience isn't *quite* prepared. As with the jolting inferences of his opening scene, Boorman's images (superbly photographed by Geoffrey Unsworth) are so complex that despite the affable guidance provided for Zed and ourselves by the aptly named Friend (John Alderton), an Eternal with a welcome sense of the incongruous and the ironic, the first encounter with *Zardoz* leaves one reeling with questions. The first step, of course, must be to consult Lyman Frank Baum, whose 'modernised fairy-tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out' provides the immediate source for the giant floating head. One recalls that the Wizard is indeed a charlatan, like Arthur Frayn and his painted-on moustachios, and while Zed is an unexpected translation of Dorothy he shares her single-minded opportunism. The emerald city of Oz itself, however, is the most significant factor – a place of such glory that its inhabitants have dark glasses padlocked to their heads. Blindness and perfection locked together, a paradox to please Frankenstein.

'How,' asks the high priestess of the Vortex, 'did we conjure up a monster in our midst, and why? This is the question we must answer.' In contemporary terms, the question can be applied to any monster you care to think of, from the motorcar to the miners' strike. In science fiction terms, the answer (we *had* to, in order to survive) was given almost as soon as Mary Shelley had defined the problem, pessimistically reaffirmed by such as Carlyle, Kipling and Wells. Taking the tone of *Leo the Last* a step further, however, Boorman now demonstrates, Cocteau-fashion, that monsters are not only essential, they are hugely welcome. It's a bold case to make, but he bases it on the irresistible combination of Darwin, Tolkien, and the Arthurian legends. And he uses every cinematic trick he can think of, including the engaging talents of a spectacularly good cast, to win us over. The hints of caricature from his earlier films remain, but rhetoric, like science fiction, thrives on exaggeration. As an end result, *Zardoz* is a luminous and compassionate exploration of what, without our realising it, has for too long been regarded as unexplorable.

Philip Strick, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1974