

= The Cincinnati Kid =

The Cincinnati Kid is a 1965 American drama film . It tells the story of Eric " The Kid " Stoner , a young Depression @-@ era poker player , as he seeks to establish his reputation as the best . This quest leads him to challenge Lancey " The Man " Howard , an older player widely considered to be the best , culminating in a climactic final poker hand between the two .

The script , adapted from Richard Jessup 's novel , was written by Ring Lardner Jr. and Terry Southern ; it was Lardner 's first major studio work since his 1947 blacklisting as one of The Hollywood Ten . The film was directed by Norman Jewison and stars Steve McQueen in the title role and Edward G. Robinson as Howard . Jewison , who replaced original director Sam Peckinpah shortly after filming began , describes The Cincinnati Kid as his " ugly duckling " film . He considers it the film that allowed him to transition from the lighter comedic films he had previously been making and take on more serious films and subjects .

The film garnered mixed reviews from critics on its initial release ; supporting actors Robinson and Joan Blondell earned award nominations for their performances .

= = Plot = =

Eric Stoner , nicknamed " The Kid , " is an up @-@ and @-@ coming poker player in New Orleans . He hears that Lancey Howard , a longtime master of the game nicknamed " The Man , " is in town , and sees it as his chance to finally become the Man himself . The Kid 's friend Shooter cautions him , reminding the Kid how he thought he was the best five @-@ card stud player in the world , until Howard " gutted " him when they played .

Howard arranges a game with wealthy William Jefferson Slade , who secures Shooter 's services as dealer . Howard wins \$ 6 @,@ 000 (over \$ 90 @,@ 000 in 2015 dollars) from Slade over a 30 @-@ hour game , angering Slade and wounding his pride . That night at Slade 's home , he tries to bribe Shooter into cheating in the Kid 's favor when the two players meet . Shooter declines , but Slade calls in Shooter 's markers worth \$ 12 @,@ 000 (over \$ 200 @,@ 000 in 2015 dollars) , and blackmails him by threatening to reveal damaging information about Shooter 's wild wife , Melba . Shooter agonizes over his decision , having spent the last 25 years building a reputation for integrity .

With the Kid 's girl Christian visiting her parents , Melba tries to seduce him , even though she and Christian are close friends . Out of respect for Shooter , he rebuffs her , and spends the day before the game with Christian at her family 's farm .

The big game starts with six players , including Howard and the Kid , with Shooter playing as he deals and Lady Fingers relieving him whenever Shooter needs a break . In the first big confrontation between the Kid and Howard , the Kid is short \$ 2 @,@ 000 (\$ 35 @,@ 000 in 2015 dollars) and Slade steps in to stake him . Several hours later , Howard busts a player called Pig , perhaps with a bluff , and the remaining players take a break . Following the break , Lady Fingers , who has been delighting in needling Howard all evening , takes over as dealer and continues to needle him .

As the game wears on , Shooter only deals , and then after another hand when Howard outplays them , two more players , Yeller and Sokal , drop out . That leaves just Howard and the Kid . After a few unlikely wins , the Kid calls for a break and confronts Shooter , who admits to being forced into cheating by Slade . The Kid insists he can win on his own and tells Shooter to deal straight or he will blow the whistle , destroying Shooter 's reputation . Before the game resumes , Melba succeeds in seducing the Kid . Christian makes a surprise visit to the room , catches them after the fact and walks out on The Kid .

Slade tells the Kid that Shooter will continue to cheat for him and confronts him with a menacing thug , but the Kid flatly refuses . Back at the game , The Kid maneuvers to have Shooter replaced by Lady Fingers , lying that Shooter is ill . He then wins several major pots from Howard , who is visibly losing confidence .

= = = Alternate ending = = =

In some cuts , the film ends with a freeze @-@ frame on Steve McQueen 's face following his penny @-@ pitching loss . Turner Classic Movies and the DVD feature the ending with Christian . Jewison wanted to end the film with the freeze @-@ frame but was overruled by the producer . The cockfight scene was cut by British censors .

= = Cast = =

= = Production = =

The Cincinnati Kid was filmed on location in New Orleans , Louisiana , a change from the original St. Louis , Missouri , setting of the novel . Spencer Tracy was originally cast as Lancey Howard , but ill health forced him to withdraw from the film . Sam Peckinpah was originally hired to direct ; producer Martin Ransohoff fired him shortly after filming began for " vulgarizing the picture . " Peckinpah 's version was to be shot in black @-@ and @-@ white to give the film a 1930s period feel . Jewison scrapped the black @-@ and @-@ white footage , feeling it was a mistake to shoot a film with the red and black of playing cards in greyscale . He did mute the colors throughout , both to evoke the period and to help pop the card colors when they appeared . Strother Martin claimed he was cast in the film but got fired after Jewison replaced Peckinpah .

The film features a theme song performed by Ray Charles and a brief appearance during the film by The Preservation Hall Jazz Band , with Emma Barrett as vocalist and pianist .

= = Soundtrack = =

= = Reception = =

Upon its 1965 release , The Cincinnati Kid was favorably reviewed by Variety which wrote " Martin Ransohoff has constructed a taut , well @-@ turned @-@ out production . In Steve McQueen he has the near @-@ perfect delineator of the title role . Edward G. Robinson is at his best in some years as the aging , ruthless Lancey Howard " Howard Thompson of The New York Times called the film a " respectably packaged drama " that is " strictly for those who relish ? or at least play ? stud poker " and notes that the " film pales beside The Hustler , to which it bears a striking similarity of theme and characterization . " Time magazine also noted the similarities to The Hustler , saying " nearly everything about Cincinnati Kid is reminiscent " of that film , but falls short in the comparison , in part because of the subject matter :

Director Jewison can put his cards on the table , let his camera cut suspensefully to the players ' intent faces , but a pool shark sinking a tricky shot into a side pocket undoubtedly offers more range . Kid also has a less compelling subplot . Away from the table , McQueen gambles on a blonde (Tuesday Weld) and on the integrity of his dealer pal , Karl Malden . Pressure comes from a conventionally vicious Southern gentleman (Rip Torn) , whose pleasures include a Negro mistress , a pistol range adjacent to his parlor , and fixed card games . As Malden 's wife , Ann @-@ Margret spells trouble of another kind , though her naive impersonation of a wicked , wicked woman recalls the era when the femme fatale wore breastplates lashed together with spider web . By the time all the bets are in , Cincinnati Kid appears to hold a losing hand .

A retrospective review published by the New York State Writers Institute of the University at Albany also noted the similarities the film had to The Hustler , but in contrast said The Cincinnati Kid 's " stylized realism , dreamlike color , and detailed subplots give [the film] a dramatic complexity and self @-@ awareness that The Hustler lacks .

Blondell was singled out for her performance as Lady Fingers with an award from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures and a Golden Globe nomination for Best Supporting Actress . Motion Picture Exhibitor magazine nominated Robinson for its Best Supporting Actor Laurel Award .

= = Home media = =

The Cincinnati Kid was released on Region 1 DVD on May 31 , 2005 . The DVD features a commentary track by director Norman Jewison , commentary on selected scenes from Celebrity Poker Showdown hosts Phil Gordon and Dave Foley and The Cincinnati Kid Plays According to Hoyle , a promotional short featuring magician Jay Ose . A Blu @-@ Ray DVD was released on June 14 , 2011 .

With the release of the film on DVD , one modern reviewer said the film " is as hip now as when it was released in 1965 " and another cited McQueen as " effortlessly watchable as the Kid , providing a masterclass in the power of natural screen presence over dialogue " and Robinson " simply fantastic . " Poker author Michael Wiesenbergr calls The Cincinnati Kid " [o] ne of the greatest poker movies of all time . "