

What is Apocalypse Now based on?



Apocalypse Now has received nothing short of plaudits ever since it first dawned on screens four decades back. Director Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 masterpiece has been a subject of critique ever since, plunging deep into the viewers' psyche, portraying both the journey of the protagonist through the unfamiliar lands of southern Vietnam and the adventure of the mind through seeming insanity.

Martin Sheen's Captain Benjamin Willard takes the brunt of the action as he's tasked with the assassination of rogue Colonel Walter Kurtz, played by Marlon Brando. Captain Willard reports to his duties on a US Navy River Patrol boat that rummages through the dense flora in search of the Colonel and his colony of duped followers. The journey is cascaded with a flurry of uncertainties and lethal threats, but in sheer movie magic, the team moves forward destined to their goal.

With an ensemble of names that have transcended popularity over the decades, such as Marlon Brando, Robert Duvall, and a surprisingly baby-faced Lawrence Fishburne (bet you'd never heard of that combination), Apocalypse Now is a

testament to pure envisioned filmmaking, the kind only a few, including Francis Ford Coppola, have been able to achieve. Although, the Vietnam War has been the background for numerous movies over the years, *Apocalypse Now* is considered a pioneer in that front.

Is *Apocalypse Now* based on a True Story?



While there may be a few who think *Apocalypse Now* contains the ingredients to be based on a true story, they might want to re-check their facts. Regrettably, and thankfully, *Apocalypse Now* is not based on a true story. Its bizarre and outlandish vignette, although set in firm historic relevance, doesn't quite hold true in reality.

Director Francis Ford Coppola's genre - defying feat might have presented him with the helm of Auteur, but that doesn't take away the fact that the movie is completely his and co-writer Milius's inception. From the characters down to their interactions in the storyline, the movie is nothing short of an incredible fictional tale. The only aspect somewhat in line with reality is its setting.

If one were to delve deeper into the actualities of *Apocalypse Now*'s story, they would unearth several fascinating facts about it. The movie is inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*, a novella depicting the story of a fictional English seaman, Charles Marlow, who is the captain of a steamer adventuring through a Congolese riverside backdrop assisted by a Belgian company.

Plenty of tropes from the film can be found in the book, and vice versa. The introduction of a riverside setting, accompanied by a group of men, should be suitable enough to at least draw some similarities. Tiny bites of colonialism, enriched in the book, can be tasted in the movie as well. It's also weird, how "Charles Marlow and Marlon Brando" sounds like something you'd find in a nursery rhyme.



Apocalypse Now was made during a time when big-corporations were gobbling up Hollywood studios, and the trust for a single person's dream, (*Apocalypse Now* in this case) wasn't necessarily good enough to barter the fund that would make movies. Executives weren't too keen to gamble on the visions of single

screenwriters and directors. This prompted Coppola to put funds together, and get whatever he could out of other producers who were willing to fund his epic tale. He also employed John Millius as the screenwriter.

Now, Millius might not receive all the plaudits he deserves for his work in the industry, but we can certainly say *Apocalypse Now* is partially his brainchild. Following his rejection to fight the war in the sixties, Millius's friends, Steven Spielberg, and George Lucas encouraged him to write a tale with the Vietnam War as a backdrop. When someone has friends like Spielberg and Lucas, they really can't say "no".



John Millius

Millius took inspiration from his college-days, when an English Professor challenged the class to re-envision the book *Heart Of Darkness* as a film, stating that it was never offered a justified adaptation. Millius took up the challenge, and began writing. He knew that a complete conversion of the text into script format wouldn't do right by it. Hence, Millius opted to alter the Congolese background into a more relevant one, Vietnam. While the book and

the films are different, as we've discussed earlier, it feels like the film holds the story of the book in spirit. Essentially deviating from the text, but reliving its core elements.

The origins of the film's name is additionally surprising. Millius tweaked the name from a hippie button badge, the kinds you'd probably find at Woodstock if you'd have been paying enough attention in the first place. The badge read, "Nirvana Now", which Millius had brilliantly transformed into "Apocalypse Now". It often makes you ponder about how non-complex some of the most ingenious ideas have been.