

# The Counselor will shock you to your core

 By [Daniel Dercksen](#) 20 Dec 2013

'Truth has no temperature' in Ridley Scott's controversial and provocative shocker *The Counselor*. It will shock you to your core.



It will be the most talked about film in years with its hardcore depiction of corrupted criminals at their most ruthless, and tainted villains taking evil and malicious intent to a whole new level of wrong, annihilating the moral fibre of humanity.

*The Counselor* does not shy away from its dark and twisted malice, allowing the reality of its hell to show the world of crime as it is without sugarcoating it.

Michael Fassbender, Penélope Cruz, Cameron Diaz, Javier Bardem, and Brad Pitt surpass their status of the world's best actors of their era in *The Counselor* with exceptional performances.

Fassbender plays a loving and respected lawyer's one-time dalliance with an illegal business deal that spirals out of control.

Told with wit, and ultimately violence and pathos, this not-to-be-missed cautionary tale is ultimately about mistakenly tempting fate, or as Cormac McCarthy states "about people who get involved in something they should have stayed out of."

*The Counselor* launches a world where 'reflective men find themselves removed from the realities of life'; where grief transcends value and becomes worthless because you cannot 'buy anything with grief'; where the hunter has grace and purity of heart.

## Scott's genius and visual style

Films set in outer space was never the same after Scott explored fear at its most vulnerable in *Alien*; a future populated by revengeful killer androids revealed the dark side of human nature in *Blade Runner*; he exposed the cultured mindscape of the world's champion serial killer in *Hannibal*; revealed the humanity of crime in *American Gangster*; turned female buddy films inside out with *Thelma and Louise*; took us into the heart and soul of a *Gladiator*; and revealed the tragic circumstances surrounding the fate of doomed marine soldiers in *Black Hawk Down*.



With *The Counselor*, Scott's legendary genius and identifiable visual style are crowned with his collaboration with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Cormac McCarthy (*All the Pretty Horses*, *No Country For Old Men*, *The Road*), whose debut screenplay for *The Counselor* is a well-crafted masterwork and takes Scott's work to a new level of excellence.

What makes *The Counselor* far superior to any other film in its genre, following respectfully in the tradition of Sergio Leone's epic *Once Upon a Time in America* and *Once Upon a Time in the West*, is that it is not simply a film about crime and its tragic consequences, but an endearing and soulful depiction of vibrant character torn between love and hate, loyalty and deceit, and lies and putrid corruption.

You have never seen Bardem in greater shape as an actor, and when his cynical and power-hungry crime lord states that "to miss something is to hope it will come back", there is no return as a world of darkness spirals out of control.

Scott equally takes the world of decadent eccentricity and opulent richness to its extreme; in one scene, the meticulous details of this exceptional visionary reveal a wealthy dinner where a leopard sits tall and proud with its diamond collar on a piano stool beside the pianist entertaining Bardem's guests.

As Bardem states: "Greed really takes you to the edge... that's not what it does, it is what it is."

### **Femme fatale prowess with Diaz**

As with *Thelma and Louise*, Scott further explores the abuse and femme fatale prowess with Diaz - evil incarnated and sexually ambivalent as you cannot imagine; besides being the queen of seduction, her sexual exploitations know no limits, especially when she has sex with Bardem's Ferrari (this scene is definitely one everyone will be talking about and will never be forgotten). Bardem accurately sums it up when he says "the truth about women is that you can do anything but bore them..."



"You don't know someone until you know what they want" brilliantly captures the world of supremacy and being in command; this is taken a step further when human nature is compared to that of cautionary diamonds; and even further when the seediness and grimy humanity of violence is described as a world where "beheadings and mutilations" are just "business" and nothing personal.

This may seem like a cliché, but sensitive viewers are definitely warned that there are scenes that will stun

your senses and shock you to the core. It took quite a while after leaving the cinema to actually shake it all out and return to a normal state of serenity.

As disturbing as it is gross, the emotional impact of certain scenes are mindblowing. The vicious brutality is extremely disturbing and ultimately a catalyst for psychological terror.

It's not that the scenes are extremely graphic, but will burn into your memory.

## **Devastating and heartbreaking conclusion**

Scott is a master of suspense, and his lingering anticipation of payoffs are effective beyond belief. Don't get too comfortable and think you know the answers to the many riddles and secrets; nothing will prepare you for the shocking, devastating and heartbreaking conclusion.



It is understandable why McCarthy was once dubbed the "Shakespeare of the West"; the unforgettable characters in his novels have captivated the imaginations of millions of readers and are fully revealed through his screenplay and Scott's brilliant interpretation in *The Counselor*. The style and astounding rich dialogue of McCarthy's screenplay are evocative and stimulates the senses to its extreme; calculated dead and ruthless meanderings are spread thick throughout the well-plotted story; a slippery slope into the darkness of its corrupt nature.

When a character states that "what follows is beyond the power of the imagination", it is no joke. If it is true that suspense kills, *The Counselor* has definitely crossed the line with its malevolent violence and brutal sexuality.

Not that it's only about violence, there's heartbreaking romance (although it has a death sentence hanging over it); in fact, there are two love stories heading for an inevitable execution.

As a filmmaker, Scott meanders eons beyond his ingenious visual splendor and meticulous direction; his visual sensibility has never been the powerful and alarmingly arresting.

He effortlessly crosses incredibly complicated physical and emotional barriers in pursuit of excellence.

*The Counselor* leaves us with an enduring melancholy, reminding us that we are the world we create, and when we cease to exist, that world dies with us.

At the end of *The Counselor*, like its tragic protagonist and flawed villains, you will have undergone severe change; the film will affect your sensibility and poison reason.

Scott delivers an astounding and awesome five-star masterwork that everyone will be talking about for years to come. It is guaranteed that you will be one of those people.

Experiencing and delving deeper into the wicked decadence of *The Counselor* can only be compared to one having the finest meal ever, vigilantly savouring each bite until the tiniest morsel is devoured.

## Behind the scenes

It all began with a morning cup of coffee. Cormac McCarthy was in the midst of writing two novels, when he awoke one day and thought he needed to take a break. But he wasn't thinking about a vacation; in fact, far from it. He decided to write a screenplay. "The screenplay reads like an exceptional short story or novella," says Ridley Scott. "It's an emotional rollercoaster ride. The script had situations and characters that were epic and an inevitability that something awful was going to happen to them - and that there was nothing they could do to stop it."

"Some folks have called this film, *No Country for Old Men* on steroids," says producer Steve Schwartz. "I think there is some truth to that. All the classic Cormac themes are in *The Counselor*: a view that humanity is not intrinsically good... but people always have choices, and we often make the wrong choices. Choices have consequences, and you sometimes live and die with them."

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## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and the journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za) to view my profile and articles...

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