

Lord of War

Lord of War is a 2005 American [crime drama](#) film^[4] written, produced, and directed by [Andrew Niccol](#), and co-produced by and starring [Nicolas Cage](#).

Lord of War



Theatrical release poster

Directed by

[Andrew Niccol](#)

Written by

Andrew Niccol

Produced by

[Nicolas Cage](#)

Norm Golightly

Andy Grosch

[Christopher Eberts](#)

[Chris Roberts](#)

[Philippe Rousselet](#)

Andrew Niccol

Starring

Nicolas Cage

[Jared Leto](#)

[Bridget Moynahan](#)

[Ian Holm](#)

[Ethan Hawke](#)

Cinematography

[Amir Mokri](#)

Edited by	Zach Staenberg
Music by	Antonio Pinto
Production companies	<p>Entertainment Manufacturing Company</p> <p>Saturn Films</p> <p>Ascendant Pictures</p> <p>VIP Medienfonds</p>
Distributed by	<p>Lions Gate Films (United States)</p> <p>20th Century Fox (Germany)^[1]</p> <p>SND Films (France)^[1]</p>
Release date	September 16, 2005 (United States)
Running time	121 minutes
Countries	<p>United States</p> <p>Germany^[2]</p> <p>France</p>
Language	English ^[2]
Budget	\$42-50 million ^{[3][1]}
Box office	\$72.6 million ^[1]

The film was released in the United States on September 16, 2005, to positive reviews and grossed \$72.6 million at the box office.

Cage plays a fictional [illegal arms dealer](#), inspired by the stories of several real-life arms dealers and smugglers.^{[5][6][7]} The film was officially endorsed by the human rights group [Amnesty International](#) for highlighting the issue of illicit [arms trafficking](#) by the international [arms industry](#).^{[8][9]}

Plot

In the early 1980s, Yuri Orlov, the eldest son of a family of [Ukrainian refugees](#), is visiting a [Brighton Beach](#) restaurant where he witnesses a [Russian mobster](#) kill two would-be assassins holding [Kalashnikov rifles](#). The incident inspires him to go into the [arms trade](#). Yuri muses that

the constant need for weapons is similar to the human need for food and drink, thus he can make a fortune. After successfully completing his first sale of an [Uzi](#) sub machine gun to a local mobster, Yuri convinces his younger brother Vitaly to become his partner.

The two brothers get their first big break during the [1982 Lebanon War](#), where they sell weapons to both Israeli and Lebanese troops despite witnessing the same weapons being used to commit war crimes and other atrocities. As Yuri begins to prosper by exploiting his growing network of business connections, he comes to the attention of [Interpol](#), in particular an idealistic agent named Jack Valentine, with whom he crosses paths on multiple occasions. Valentine represents a unique threat to Yuri because he is after glory, not money, and thus cannot be bought off.

Vitaly becomes addicted to [cocaine](#) after a [Colombian](#) drug lord forces the brothers to accept several kilos of cocaine to pay for an arms sale of numerous [Glock 17](#) pistols. Yuri quietly checks Vitaly into a [drug rehabilitation](#) clinic and continues his business alone. He lures childhood crush Ava Fontaine to a false photo shoot, and they subsequently get married and have a son.

Following the [dissolution of the Soviet Union](#), Yuri flies to [Ukraine](#) and illegally buys Russian tanks, guns, and munitions through his uncle, a former [Soviet](#) general who is overseeing the distribution of weapons to the newly-formed [Ukrainian army](#). However, his uncle is killed in a car bombing attack planted by Yuri's rival in arms deal, Simeon Weisz. Yuri then expands his business to Africa, where he begins a business relationship with Andre Baptiste Sr., a ruthless dictator engaged in a brutal civil war in [Liberia](#).

During one flight into Africa in 2001, Yuri's plane is intercepted by Valentine and forced to land. Yuri escapes arrest by landing in a remote area and giving away all of his cargo to the locals. Yuri makes it back to his hotel and is surprised by Baptiste who coercing him into killing Simeon to avenge his uncle and eliminate his competition. Yuri gives in and shoots Simeon dead.

Valentine then tells Ava her husband is an [arms dealer](#), prompting her to confront him. To please his wife, Yuri tries to legitimize his business in trading timbers, but soon becomes frustrated with the difficulties and lower earnings of honest work. When Baptiste visits him in person and offers him the largest payday of his career, a stash of valuable [blood diamonds](#), Yuri goes back to crime.

Yuri picks up Vitaly to assist him with a major deal in [Sierra Leone](#), where a militia force allied with Baptiste is visibly preparing to destroy a refugee camp. Unable to stomach his guilt, Vitaly

pleads with Yuri to abandon the deal, but his brother refuses knowing that Baptiste's men will kill them for refusing to hand over the guns. Vitaly then steals a pair of grenades and uses them to destroy a truck full of weapons, accidentally killing Baptiste's son. He is gunned down by the militia, and while Yuri is spared due to his relationship with Baptiste Sr., he only receives half of the diamonds he was promised due to half of the shipment being destroyed. He then watches helpless as the militia massacres the refugees.

Yuri ships his brother's remains back to the United States. He pays a doctor to forge a phony death certificate and remove the bullets from Vitaly's body, but one bullet remains, and Yuri is apprehended by federal agents. Meanwhile, while being followed by Valentine, Ava finds a security container belonging to her husband, establishing definitive proof of Yuri's guilt. Ava finds the container full of her paintings, which Yuri secretly bought to prop up her career as an artist. Ava takes their son and leaves him for good. When Yuri tries to reconcile with his parents, his mother angrily disowns him for getting Vitaly killed.

Valentine detains Yuri in anticipation of his trial and conviction, but Yuri is unfazed. He then tells Valentine that, in a matter of minutes, a high-ranking American army officer will arrive and release him without any charges being filed. He explains that while he may be a criminal, the U.S. government is willing to turn a blind eye to his crimes because most of his weapons end up in the hands of their allies, who they cannot be seen publicly supplying with arms. Valentine then hears a knock at the door and realizes that Yuri is right, but before walking away, he says "I would tell you to go to hell, but I think you're already there."

Yuri soon returns to the arms trade, claiming that it's what he does best. The film concludes with a statement on how the five largest arms producers in the world are also the five permanent members of the [United Nations Security Council](#).

Cast

- [Nicolas Cage](#) as Yuri Orlov (largely based on the exploits of international arms dealer [Viktor Bout](#))^[10]
- [Ethan Hawke](#) as Interpol Agent Jack Valentine
- [Jared Leto](#) as Vitaly Orlov
- [Bridget Moynahan](#) as Ava Fontaine

- [Eamonn Walker](#) as André Baptiste Sr. (largely based on former [President of Liberia](#), [Charles Taylor](#))^[11]
- [Sammi Rotibi](#) as André Baptiste Jr. (largely based on Charles Taylor's son [Chuckie](#))
- [Ian Holm](#) as Simeon Weisz (mostly based on [Sarkis Soghanalian](#))
- [Eugene Lazarev](#) as General Dmitri Volkov

Production

The producer largely financed the film with funding from outside the U.S. He claimed this was due to the highlighting of U.S. involvement in the international arms trade.^[12]

Some of the Russian language dialogues in the film (mostly those by [Eugene Lazarev](#) as Gen. Volkov) contain obscene [Russian mat](#) wording translated to softer expressions in the original English [subtitles](#).

A scene in the film featured 50 tanks, which were provided by a Czech source. The tanks were only available until December of the year of filming, as the dealer needed them to sell in Libya.^[13] The production team bought 3,000 real SA [Vz. 58](#) rifles to stand in for [AK-47s](#) because they were cheaper than prop guns.^[14]

When looking at the top of a Vz. 58, it is visually different from an AK-pattern rifles, with a different front sight, handguard, charging handle and dust cover. When looking at the bottom, the only visual differences are very minor dimensional changes in the stock, pistol grip, and magazine that would only be visible to someone who already knows the difference. Hence the Vz. 58s are only seen in gun racks, never in an actor's hands, and any close up on a rifle itself uses a prop modeled after a proper AK.

Release

Critical reception

On [Rotten Tomatoes](#) the film has a 61% rating based on 147 reviews. The site's consensus states: "While *Lord of War* is an intelligent examination of the gun trade, it is too scattershot in its plotting to connect."^[15] On [Metacritic](#) it has a score of 62% based on reviews from 31 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[16]

[Roger Ebert](#) of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, gave the film three and a half out of four stars, writing "After movies like *Hotel Rwanda*, *Before the Rain* and *Welcome to Sarajevo*, the cold cynicism of *Lord of War* plays like a deadly footnote."^[17] The film received a special mention for excellence in filmmaking from the [National Board of Review](#).

Box office

The film grossed \$9,390,144 on its opening weekend, ranking number three at the North American box office behind *Just Like Heaven* and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. After the film's 7 weeks of release, it grossed a total of \$24,149,632 on the domestic market (US and Canada), and \$48,467,436 internationally, for a worldwide total of \$72,617,068.^[1]

Home media

Lord of War was released on Blu-ray, DVD and VHS on January 18, 2006.^[18] A 4K UHD Blu-ray transfer of *Lord of War* was released on March 19, 2019.^[19]

The UK DVD release of *Lord of War* includes, prior to the film, an advertisement for [Amnesty International](#), showing the [AK-47](#) being sold on a [shopping channel](#) of the style popular on [cable networks](#). The American DVD release includes a bonus feature that shows the various weapons used in the film, allowing viewers to click on each weapon to get statistics about their physical dimensions and histories. The DVD bonus section also contains a [public service announcement](#) from [Nicolas Cage](#) that addresses the issue of illicit arms sales.

See also

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- *While There's War There's Hope* (1974 film), Italian film directed and starring [Alberto Sordi](#); a film with similar subject and topic coverage
 - *War Dogs* (2016 film), biopic about international arms dealers
 - [Viktor Bout](#), notorious Russian arms dealer who partially inspired the movie

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External links



Wikiquote has quotations related to ***Lord of War***.

- [Official website](http://www.lordofwarthemovie.com) (<http://www.lordofwarthemovie.com>)
- *Lord of War* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0399295/>) at *IMDb*
- *Lord of War* (<https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/620707/enwp>) at the *TCM Movie Database*
- *Lord of War* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v314426>) at *AllMovie*

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