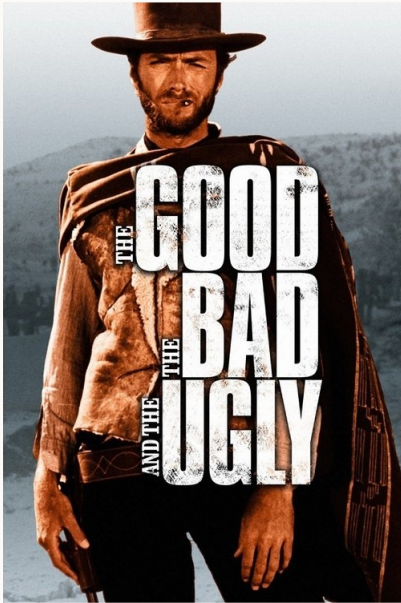




WESTERN

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

1966 · Directed by Sergio Leone

Spaghetti Western

War Film

Auteur Cinema

Three gunmen, none of them honest, chase a fortune in buried Confederate gold across a Southwest torn up by the Civil War. Sergio Leone turns a treasure hunt into a sprawling, darkly funny, operatic Western built on silence, close-ups and music.

DIRECTOR	Sergio Leone
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YEAR	1966
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RUNTIME	2h 41m (161 min)
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COUNTRY	Italy/Spain/West Germany
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GENRES	Western
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CAST	Clint Eastwood, Eli Wallach, Lee Van Cleef, Aldo Giuffrè, Luigi Pistilli
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MUSIC	Ennio Morricone
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IMDB	8.8 / 10 (889,734 votes)
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ROTTEN TOMATOES	97% (critics)
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METACRITIC	90 / 100
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TMDB SCORE	8.5 / 10 (9,990 votes)
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WHERE TO WATCH	Stream (US): fuboTV, MGM+ Amazon Channel, Philo, MGM Plus Roku Premium Channel, MGM Plus
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Rent: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home, Spectrum On Demand

Buy: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home

Part one is spoiler-free. Part two, "After watching", reveals the story, scenes and ending.

Before watching

Spoiler-free

WHY WATCH THIS?

1 The film that defines the Spaghetti Western

This is the summit of Sergio Leone's Dollars films and the most celebrated Italian Western ever made. It fixed the genre's look: extreme close-ups, wide vistas, and cynical antiheroes in place of clean-cut heroes.

2 Ennio Morricone's score is a character

Music is not decoration here. Morricone's coyote-like main theme, and the long final build, drive entire sequences. Leone stages scenes as if composed for the music.

3 Patience turned into spectacle

At 161 minutes, the film stretches silence, stares and waiting into set pieces. It shows how cinema can create tension through time and framing rather than dialogue.

WHY IT MATTERS IN CINEMA HISTORY

A defining film of the Spaghetti Western and the conclusion of Leone's Dollars trilogy. It reworked a classic American genre from a European point of view, with irony, violence and grand stylisation.

WATCH WITH INTENTION

YOUR LENS

Watch it as a film built like music: time, silence and faces are orchestrated, and the story is secondary to rhythm.

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE

- How often Leone cuts from vast landscapes to extreme close-ups of eyes, and how that sudden change in scale builds suspense.
- How long scenes hold before anyone speaks or acts, and what the sound of wind, flies, boots and music fills the silence with.
- How the Civil War sits behind the treasure hunt: who the three men are loyal to, and whether it seems to matter to them.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

Each man calls himself, or is called, something different: who in this film do you trust, and does your answer change as it goes on?

CINEMA AT THE TIME

- **Genre:** The classical Hollywood Western, with its moral clarity and noble lawmen, was fading. Italian producers revived the form cheaply, shooting in Spain and treating it with irony and a harsher physical world.
- **Industry:** Co-production between Italy, Spain and West Germany was common. Films were shot without live sound and dubbed afterwards, so image and music could be shaped with unusual freedom.
- **Director's moment:** After *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) and *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), Leone had the budget, a major United Artists distribution deal and the freedom to go larger.
- **Technology:** Shot in widescreen Techniscope, the film lets Leone place faces and landscapes in the same frame, switching between enormous distance and intense close-up.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

FILM

A Fistful of Dollars (1964)

Leone's first Western, itself inspired by Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, established the cynical antihero, the Morricone sound and the style that this film expanded.



FILM

Stagecoach (1939)

John Ford's classic established the Western's landscapes and character types. Leone drew on them while rejecting their moral clarity.



FILM

Seven Samurai (1954)

Kurosawa's samurai epics, and Yojimbo in particular, taught Leone how to treat violence and humour in a stylised, realistic way.



THIS FILM

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)

NEW AT THE TIME *It treated a Western as a stylised, morally cynical epic, set against the Civil War, where editing, faces and music matter more than dialogue.*

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Made in the mid-1960s boom of Italian cinema, when a postwar Italy sought its own take on the American West, with Spanish locations and a low-cost co-production.

- **Country and moment:** Italy was in the tail end of its postwar economic miracle. Audiences filled cinemas, and Italian producers sold cheap, export-friendly genre films across Europe and beyond.
- **Economy and co-production:** The film was financed by Italian, Spanish and West German interests, with United Artists backing distribution. Spain offered cheap labour, wide landscapes and Spanish army extras for the battle scenes, under Franco's regime.
- **Politics and history:** The story is set in the American Civil War, but it was made in a Europe still shaped by the Second World War and the Cold War. Leone's view of war is cynical, treating it as waste rather than glory.
- **The filmmaker's situation:** Leone had come from assisting on Italian historical epics. After *A Fistful of Dollars* and *For a Few Dollars More*, he now had far more money and creative freedom, and this was the final film of his so-called Dollars trilogy.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Pace:** Deliberately slow, with long silent build-ups, broken by sudden violence and comic episodes. Allow for its length.
- **Style:** Operatic and stylised: extreme close-ups, wide compositions, dark humour, and a heightened, almost mythic version of the Old West.
- **Sound:** Dialogue was dubbed after shooting, as was standard in Italian cinema, so lip-sync can look slightly loose. Morricone's score is prominent.
- **Format:** Colour, widescreen at about 2.35:1. Best watched on the largest screen available.
- **Versions:** The original Italian release ran longer than the first US release. Restored editions include extra scenes, so runtimes vary.
- **Language:** Mostly English-language versions are circulated, though the cast spoke different languages on set. Subtitles may be used in some editions.

WATCH WITH KIDS?

15+ SUGGESTED AGE

Ratings range from France's all-audiences to Britain's 18, with the US at R and Germany at 16. As a long, violent film it suits mid-teens watching with you.

Official ratings: US R · UK 18 · Germany 16/18 · France TP

- **Good for:** Teens who enjoy stylish, tense adventure: striking desert landscapes, Ennio Morricone's famous score, dark humour, and long, suspenseful showdowns that reward patient viewing.
- **May unsettle, violence:** Frequent gunfights and killings, usually quick and not very bloody, but treated casually and sometimes with dark humour.
- **May unsettle, intensity:** Includes a prolonged scene of cruelty that is more disturbing for what is heard and implied than for what is shown.
- **May unsettle, war imagery:** Large-scale battle scenes show many casualties and the suffering of wounded soldiers, with a bleak view of war.
- **May unsettle, pace:** At nearly three hours, with long wordless stretches, it can test the patience of younger or restless viewers.
- **Explain first:** It is set during the American Civil War, the conflict between the Union and Confederate sides, which forms the backdrop to the story.
- **Explain first:** Leone's style uses long silences, extreme close-ups and slowly built tension, so the leisurely pace is deliberate rather than a flaw.
- **Explain first:** This is a stylised, darkly comic Western, not a realistic one, and its tone about violence and morality is cynical.

Talk about it after: *Why do you think the film lets scenes run so long without dialogue, and how did that affect the tension you felt?*

Cinespective's own guidance, a draft. Check it against the official ratings and your own judgement.

After watching

CONTAINS SPOILERS

THE FILM, UNPACKED

CENTRAL IDEA

The film can be read as an ironic look at greed and war: three morally compromised men pursue gold while a larger, senseless slaughter plays out around them, and the only decent feelings appear in small, unexpected moments.

THEMES

- **Greed and shifting alliances:** The partnership between Blondie and Tuco is built on mutual betrayal and need. Trust in the film is always provisional and always transactional.
- **War as futility:** The Civil War is shown less as a cause than as a vast machine of waste. Armies fight over a bridge while the principals care only about the money.
- **Moral labels versus behaviour:** The title sorts the men into categories, but their actions blur them. The film invites you to question who is actually good, bad or ugly.
- **Myth and demystification:** Leone uses the Western's iconography, such as the duel, the stranger and the desert, but strips away its nobility, leaving ritual and survival.
- **Death and absurdity:** Sudden killings, comic hangings and bleak battlefields coexist, giving the film a sardonic attitude to mortality.

Key scenes

The bridge and the dying captain

The long battle over a worthless bridge exposes the war's absurdity, while a quiet moment with a dying soldier gives Blondie a flicker of humanity. The film's tone shifts from comedy to something graver.

The run through Sad Hill Cemetery

Tuco's frantic sprint among thousands of graves, set to Morricone's *The Ecstasy of Gold*, is a pure cinematic set piece. Music, editing and camera movement combine to express greed as ecstasy.

The three-way duel

The final standoff stretches time through escalating close-ups of eyes and hands, cut to music. It turns a shootout into a ritual and is the clearest demonstration of Leone's editing style.

The prison camp

Angel Eyes' interrogation of Tuco, covered by music played to drown out the screams, shows the film's willingness to turn cruelty into a grim, almost theatrical performance.

Filmmaking

- **Editing and framing:** Leone alternates huge landscapes with extreme close-ups of eyes, mouths and hands. The jump in scale stretches duels into slow rituals, and shapes the film's tension.
- **Music:** Ennio Morricone's score uses whistles, electric guitar, choirs and animal-like cries. Themes identify each character, and key sequences are built around musical structure, not dialogue.
- **Performance:** Eastwood's minimalism, Wallach's voluble, physical comedy, and Van Cleef's cold menace contrast sharply, giving each man a different rhythm and sound.
- **Landscape and design:** Shot largely in Spain, the dusty towns, deserts and huge war sets feel both authentic and mythical. Details like dirt, sweat and flies give the epic a tactile quality.
- **Sound design:** With all sound added afterwards, Leone could exaggerate gunshots, creaks and silence. Sound becomes a precisely controlled expressive tool.

THE FULL STORY

The full plot, including the ending.

During the Civil War, a bounty hunter known as Blondie works a profitable racket with the outlaw Tuco. He turns Tuco in for the reward, then shoots the rope at the last moment and splits the money. When Tuco's price rises too high, Blondie leaves him in the desert, and Tuco spends days chasing revenge.

Meanwhile the mercenary Angel Eyes hunts a Confederate soldier, Bill Carson, who knows where a fortune in gold is buried. Tuco and Blondie each learn part of the secret from the dying Carson: one knows the name of the cemetery, the other the name on the grave.

Union soldiers capture the pair. Angel Eyes, who has joined the army as a sergeant, tortures Tuco into revealing the cemetery. Tuco escapes, and Blondie and Tuco reunite and head for the cemetery, caught up in a vast battle over a bridge, which they blow up to clear their way.

At Sad Hill Cemetery, Tuco finds the grave named Arch Stanton and starts digging. Blondie reveals that the gold is actually in another grave, and the three men face off in a triangular duel. Blondie, who has secretly emptied Tuco's gun, kills Angel Eyes. The gold is found, but Blondie makes Tuco stand on a grave marker with a noose around his neck, takes half the gold and rides away. Then he shoots the rope, leaving Tuco's share behind.

BEHIND THE FILM

- **The Spanish army builds a cemetery:** The Sad Hill Cemetery set, with thousands of circular graves, was built in Burgos, Spain, with the help of Spanish soldiers. Decades later, fans restored the abandoned site.
- **The bridge sequence:** The battle over the bridge used Spanish army help. The bridge was built for the film and blown up on camera, which required a re-shoot when a first attempt was ruined by a premature explosion.
- **Dubbed from the start:** As was usual in Italian cinema, the cast spoke their lines in different languages and everything was dubbed later. This freed Leone to concentrate on image and rhythm, without needing clean live sound.

- **Leone's music approach:** Leone and Morricone were childhood classmates. Their working method gave the music a bigger role than in most films, so that long scenes seem to be shaped around Morricone's themes.
- **Restored scenes:** A later restoration added scenes cut from the American release. Some actors returned to record new dialogue, which is why those restored sequences have a different voice quality.
- **Myth:** It was shot in the American Southwest, which is where the story is set. **Reality:** It was filmed mostly in Spain, around Almería and Burgos. The Spanish landscape stood in for the American West, as it did for many European Westerns.
- **Myth:** It is a direct sequel to the earlier Dollars films, with Eastwood playing the same man. **Reality:** The three films tell separate stories and share a star, a director and a composer. Eastwood's character is a different figure each time; this film is set during the Civil War.

LEGACY AND CONNECTIONS

Its place in the lineage before → after

FILM

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Seven Samurai (1954)

Kurosawa's samurai epics, and Yojimbo in particular, taught Leone how to treat violence and humour in a stylised, realistic way.



THIS FILM

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)



FILM

Once Upon a Time in the West (1968)

Leone's next Western pushes his style toward a slower, more elegiac and mythic epic.



MOVEMENT

Spaghetti Western

The film became the model for the genre and inspired dozens of Italian Westerns that copied its look and score.



FILMMAKER

Quentin Tarantino

Tarantino's use of music, standoffs and extended tension owes a clear debt to Leone, and he has often acknowledged it.

Reception and reputation

The film was a major commercial hit in Italy and did well when it reached the United States in 1967. Many American critics found it too violent, too long and too cynical, and treated it as a slick imitation of the Western rather than a serious work.

Its reputation grew steadily. Once dismissed as pulp, it is now seen as one of the great Westerns and a landmark of stylised filmmaking. Leone's direction and Morricone's music are widely studied, and the final duel is among cinema's most recognised scenes.

Cultural impact beyond cinema

- **Morricone's theme everywhere:** The main theme, with its coyote-like two-note call, became one of the most recognisable pieces of music in the world. It is widely used in advertising, sport and comedy as instant shorthand for a showdown, and Hugo Montenegro's 1968 cover was a chart hit.
- **Mexican standoff shorthand:** The three-way duel in the circular Sad Hill cemetery, with its cutting between eyes, hands and holsters, became the template for the staged standoff. Parodies and homages in cartoons, sitcoms, video games and comedies use the same squinting close-ups and whistling music.
- **Eastwood's Man with No Name:** The poncho, cigarillo and laconic stare fixed Clint Eastwood's image as a taciturn anti-hero. That persona carried into his later work, and the figure of the silent, morally ambiguous gunslinger became a stock character in popular culture.
- **Phrases and fan culture:** The title has become a common formula, adapted for countless headlines and articles ranking people or things into three types. Fans have also restored Sad Hill in Spain, a project documented in the 2017 film *Sad Hill Unearthed*.

Its lasting influence

Leone's close-ups, stretched tension and music-led scenes influenced directors from Sam Peckinpah to Quentin Tarantino and Sergio Corbucci's followers. Morricone's score became a template for how music can shape a film.

WHAT NEXT?

CONTINUE THE DIRECTOR

Once Upon a Time in the West (1968)

Leone's next Western slows the pace, deepens the myth, and uses Morricone's music even more ambitiously. It is the natural second step.

SEE WHAT INFLUENCED IT

Stagecoach (1939)

John Ford's classic shows the Hollywood Western that Leone reacted against, with its moral order, noble heroes and Monument Valley.

COMPARE ANOTHER APPROACH

The Searchers (1956)

Ford's darker, more ambiguous Western shows the genre questioning itself, a useful comparison with Leone's more radical cynicism.

FOLLOW THE IDEA

Seven Samurai (1954)

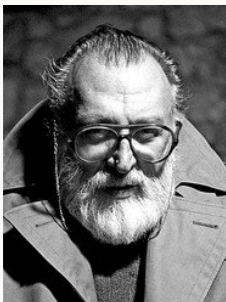
Kurosawa's samurai epic shows the Japanese tradition that fed into the Spaghetti Western, as well as masterly action editing.

JUMP FORWARD

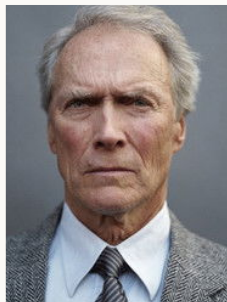
Bonnie and Clyde (1967)

Released a year later, it brought the same stylised, ironic violence and sympathy for outlaws to American cinema.

FULL CAST AND CREW



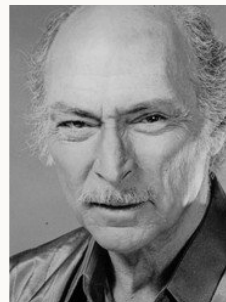
Sergio Leone
DIRECTOR



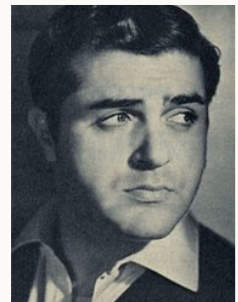
Clint Eastwood
ACTOR
as Blondie



Eli Wallach
ACTOR
as Tuco Ramirez



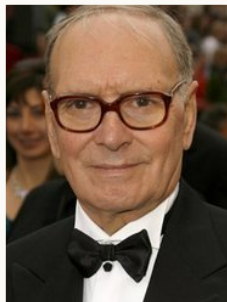
Lee Van Cleef
ACTOR
as Sentenza / Angel
Eyes



Aldo Giuffrè
ACTOR
as Alcoholic Union
Captain



Luigi Pistilli
ACTOR
as Father Pablo Ramirez



Ennio Morricone
COMPOSER

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