

Foreign Language Film Festival 2008-2009

Lord of War



About the movie (subtitled version)

DIRECTOR	Andrew Niccol
YEAR / COUNTRY	2005 / USA
GENRE	Drama
ACTORS	Nicholas Cage, Bridget Moynahan, Ethan Hawke

PLOT	page 1
LANGUAGE	page 1
GRAMMAR	page 1
VOCABULARY	page 2

PLOT

Based on real events, the film follows the rise of "Yuri" as an international arms dealer, fighting for market share against established competition and an implacable and incorruptible Interpol agent, not to mention walking a tightrope whilst negotiating with some of the world's most dangerous and unpredictable dictators, his customers.

LANGUAGE

Standard contemporary US English, some slang expressions (see below).

GRAMMAR

- Compound nouns:

Lord of War/Warlord: what's the difference?

Warlord is the more common compound noun (where two nouns form a third, obviously related one). By splitting the compound noun into its original components we are being invited to regard the subject as something not so common as a warlord but THE Lord of War: in this case, the guy that enables it all to happen, not just one of the various leaders in conflicts. In English, when you find the preposition used in this way, it is giving special emphasis to the status and importance of the person (i.e. *the Sheriff of Nottingham, the Clerk of the Court, the President of the United States* etc.).

Compound nouns often cannot be separated, a point that becomes a running joke in the film between Yuri, the arms dealer, and Baptiste, the dictator of Liberia: "It's *bloodbath*, not *bath of blood*...".

- Conditional:

Right at the beginning of the film Yuri explains how he became an arms dealer when he witnesses an attempted assassination in a restaurant: "*It couldn't have hit me harder if I'd been the one that'd been shot*". These constructions always seem difficult in English, especially in conversation when the speaker – as in this example – uses the contracted form of auxiliary verb. Here, we could substitute "*that*" with "*who*", since the "object" of the sentence is obviously a person. Shortly after in the film we get another common example of the so-called "third conditional", which is the tense we use to talk about what might have happened in time past but didn't: "*What if we'd had a customer*"? Here, the contraction is conventional to avoid saying an uncomfortable "*what if we had had*..."

- Howlers:

Howlers are conspicuous and laughable mistakes, in this case in the film's subtitles.

"*(The Cold War) kept the tensions frozen*" becomes "*It kept the pensions frozen*" and "*We broke the cardinal rule*" becomes "*We broke the carnal rule*" which is not what he wants to say at all. Subtitles are risky tools to use for watching films in English since they often do not follow what characters are saying word for word, resorting to omission, compression or being, quite simply, wrong.

VOCABULARY

What's going down (song): what's happening	Cut them in: give them a share (deal them cards in poker)
To have a point: to be right	Crash course: accelerated learning programme
Getting whacked: being shot	I couldn't care less: it really doesn't matter to me at all
Knack: a special, natural skill	Jam (vb): get stuck/blocked i.e. traffic jam
Under the counter gun running: illegal arms trade	To bust: catch a criminal
Flair: skill, ability	Payoffs: bribes
Go legit: become legitimate/legal	Pillaging: looting, mass stealing
Tipped off: when someone informs the police in advance	Heist: sophisticated robbery
Get a handle on: identifying name/reach understanding of	Hacking off: chopping off
Foolproof: infallible	Wanton: gratuitous, unnecessary, random (cruelty/violence)
Snorting: inhaling (cocaine)	Truce: ceasefire (peace talks)
Odds (n): probability/chances	New breed: new generation/type
20 grand: 20 thousand (dollars or pounds)	Phoney: fake, false
I nearly went broke trying: I almost bankrupted myself	Traffic (n&vb): illegal trade
Living way beyond my means: spending more money than you've really got	Neighbourhoods: city district
Mortgaged to the hilt: totally indebted (imagine a knife stabbed fully in)	Bedlam: chaos
You're high: drugged (excited)	Buck (n): dollar
Disgruntled: unhappy about things	Wrapped up: concluded
Shit-faced: drunk	Flinching: hesitating
Squabbling: arguing	Carnage: slaughter, bloodshed
Rigging elections: fixing a vote, falsifying a result	To thrive: prosper