

Blu-Ray Review: Stanley Kubrick's Timeless 'Paths of Glory' Joins Criterion Collection

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 3, 2010 - 1:40pm

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CHICAGO – “*Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.*” No film has as succinctly captured the truth of this brilliant Samuel Johnson quote as Stanley Kubrick’s masterful “Paths of Glory,” one of the best anti-war films ever made. It’s a work that often gets overlooked by the flashier projects like “2001: A Space Odyssey,” “A Clockwork Orange,” or “The Shining” that Kubrick would make later in his career, but it’s easily one the best works from one of history’s best directors and the Criterion Collection Blu-ray release of the film is another stunning beauty.



Blu-Ray Rating: **5.0/5.0**

A World War I French colonel (Kirk Douglas, giving one of his career-best performances) gets an order to send his troops on a seemingly-impossible mission. He is told from the beginning that the most-optimistic projections are that half of the already-shellshocked men will die during this mission but he has no choice. Of course, his men are unable to carry out the mission and take the hill that they have been irrationally assigned to hold. When French soldiers are ordered to fire on their own men who are seen as mutinous for their cowardice, things go from bad to much, much worse.

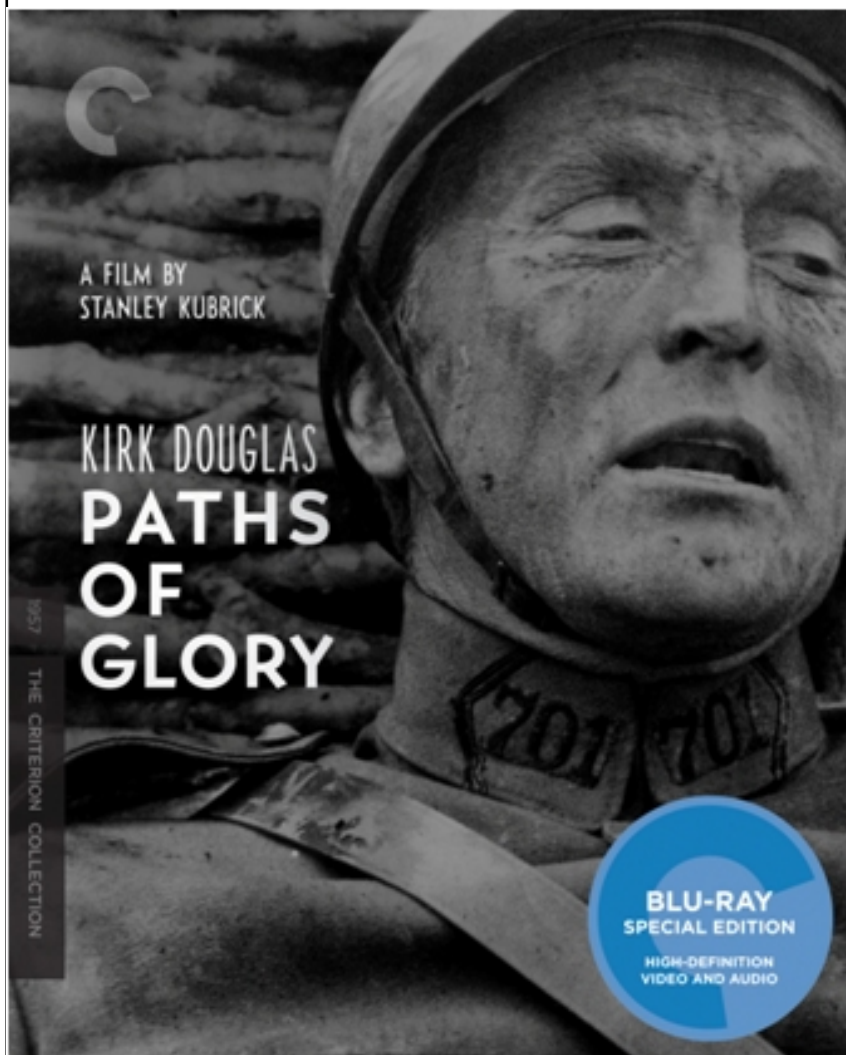


Paths of Glory was released on Blu-ray and DVD on October 26th, 2010

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Who’s to blame when war games go horribly wrong? The army tries to blame the colonel, accusing his men of cowardice, but Kubrick makes clear that it is the war machine that is broken and not the people subject to its malfunctions. “Paths of Glory” began Kubrick’s examination of

how something as cold as war fails to take into consideration the fallibility of humanity. It was a subject he'd address again in "Dr. Strangelove" and "Full Metal Jacket."



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Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

"Paths of Glory" features some of Kubrick's most powerful imagery, which is truly saying something for anyone even slightly familiar with one of the most visually-impressive directors of all time. As Douglas walks the line preparing his men for what he knows is a suicide mission, it looks and sounds like something out of Dante's "Inferno." And the ensuing death march would be remarkable in a 2010 film much less when one considers how much harder it was to pull off in a 1957 one. I can only imagine how rattling the scene must have been to a '50s audience with the wounds of World War II and The Korean War still fresh.

These sequences look and sound incredible in HD courtesy of a new, restored high-definition transfer with an uncompressed monaural soundtrack. The well-lit sequences (the attack takes place during the day) and, particularly, the final courtroom scenes, look amazing, but some of the nighttime sequences feature a bit more grain than I would have expected. For the most part, "Paths of Glory" looks amazing: It's only in the rare moments that it doesn't that it can be kind of distracting.

The special features in "Paths of Glory" are typically-impressive for Criterion, including a new audio commentary by critic Gary Giddins, an excerpt from a 1966 audio interview with director Stanley Kubrick, a television interview from 1979 with star Kirk Douglas, new video interviews with Kubrick's longtime executive producer Jan Harlan, "Paths of Glory" producer James B. Harris, and actress Christiane Kubrick, a French television piece about a real-life World War I execution that partly inspired the film, and a theatrical trailer.

How can someone who merely shouts orders and never puts their life on the line accuse those who do of cowardice and insubordination? It seems impossible and yet it is still a fatal flaw in the war machine in that those who put lives in jeopardy rarely risk their own. The themes of "Paths of Glory" are timeless and we owe a debt of gratitude to The Criterion Collection for bringing them back to resonate once more.

"Paths of Glory" stars Kirk Douglas, Ralph Meeker, Adolphe Menjou, George Macready, Wayne Morris, and Richard Anderson. It was written by Stanley Kubrick, Calder Willingham, and Jim Thompson and directed by Kubrick. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD by The Criterion Collection on October 26th, 2010.



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