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# THE GRAND DUEL

(1972)

## CAST

**Lee Van Cleef** Sherrif Clayton  
**Alberto Dentice** Philip Vermeer (as **Peter O'Brien**)  
**Jess Hahn** Bighorse the Stagecoach Driver  
**Horst Frank** David Saxon  
**Klaus Grünberg** Adam Saxon  
**Antonio Casale** Holk (as **Antony Vernon**)  
**Marc Mazza** Sherrif Eli Saxon  
**Dominique Darel** Elisabeth  
**Alessandra Cardini** Anita (as **Sandra Cardini**)  
**Gastone Pescucci** Borghese the Caretaker  
**Elvira Cortese** Madame Oro  
**Anna Maria Gherardi** Saxon's Girl  
**Hans Terofal** Jo Barrel

## CREW

Produced by **Henryk Chrosicki**, **Ettore Rosboch** and **Alfonso Sansone** (uncredited)  
Directed by **Giancarlo Santi**  
Written by **Ernesto Gastaldi**  
Director of Photography **Mario Vulpiani**  
Film Editor **Roberto Perpignani**  
Music Composed by **Sergio Bardotti**  
Arranged and Conducted by **Luis Enriquez Bacalov** (as **Luis Enriquez**)  
Assistant Directors **Fabio Garriba c.s.c.**, **Claude Othnin Girard**, **Harald Buggenig** (uncredited)  
Costumes by **Lina Nerli Taviani**  
Production Manager **Roberto Giussani**





## IN THE GRAND TRADITION OF LEONE

by Kevin Grant

By 1972, the spaghetti western in creative terms was on its last legs – not quite a dead horse but certainly ailing, its flanks ragged from flogging. Plenty of productions limped through the gate – almost 60 European westerns were released that year – but few of these were thoroughbreds. The priority for most studios was to squeeze every drop of profit from the genre's latest iteration as farcical comedy, following Enzo Barboni's sensationally popular 'Trinity' films. The most successful western at the Italian box office that season, unsurprisingly, starred Trinity himself, Terence Hill, in Barboni's *Man of the East* (*E poi lo chiamarono il magnifico*). Notwithstanding its own comedic moments, Giancarlo Santi's *The Grand Duel* (*Il grande duello*) was one of relatively few dramatic westerns to break the flow, which would make it deserving of attention even without its other points of interest. Chief among these is the presence of Lee Van Cleef in the last fully satisfying role he would play in a European western.

As former sheriff Clayton, who holds the key to a murder mystery, Van Cleef summons the spirits of his most iconic characters – steely and enigmatic in the mould of Colonel Mortimer, with a dash of Sabata's sly intelligence and flair for the dramatic. Clayton intervenes when Philip Vermeer (Alberto Dentice, credited as 'Peter O'Brien'), a young man unjustly accused of murdering the patriarch of the fearsome Saxon clan, is cornered by bounty hunters. Philip believes that old man Saxon ordered the killing of his own father, known to have struck it rich in silver, and slips out of Clayton's clutches on the way to Saxon City. There we meet the patriarch's sons: the effeminate Adam (Klaus Grünberg); the choleric Eli (Marc Mazza), town marshal, and the calculating David (Horst Frank), who has







ambitions for the family that stretch all the way to Washington. To this end he has arranged a marriage of convenience between Elisabeth (Dominique Darel), scion of a politically powerful family, and Adam, who obviously finds the idea distasteful. The real murderer's identity comes to light on the day that Philip is scheduled to hang, when his guardian angel saves him once again. Clayton takes centre stage and prepares to settle accounts with the Saxons.

Clayton's stewardship of Philip repeats the inter-generational dynamic that ran through most of Van Cleef's spaghetti westerns. He was paired with younger and more vigorous performers in *For a Few Dollars More* (*Per qualche dollaro in più*, 1965), *The Big Gundown* (*La resa dei conti*, 1966), *Day of Anger* (*I giorni dell'ira*, 1967), *Death Rides a Horse* (*Da uomo a uomo*, 1967), *Beyond the Law* (*Al di là della legge*, 1968) and *God's Gun* (*Diamante Lobo*, 1976), usually with the aspect of a mentor dispensing hard-won wisdom – notably the gunfighting do's and don'ts he passes down to Giuliano Gemma in *Day of Anger* (written, as was *The Grand Duel*, by the ubiquitous Ernesto Gastaldi). *The Grand Duel* gets plenty of mileage from the contrast between Van Cleef's cool, watchful manner, which he imparts so effortlessly to his characterisation, and the physicality of Denticè, a novice actor with only a couple of roles as hippies behind him; he retained the lush hair and beard for his role here. (He quit the business after this film, and later became a respected journalist.) While Clayton has the sixth sense of a seasoned professional, demonstrated in the opening sequence when he casually alerts Philip to the hiding places of his enemies, the younger man relies on acrobatic showboating – leaping from buildings, pole vaulting – to extricate himself from scrapes.

The characters' functions – lawman with a conscience; fall guy with a grudge – will be familiar to anybody who has seen *The Big Gundown*, in which Van Cleef's veteran manhunter helped track down Tomas Milian's persecuted peon, eventually to side with him against his accusers. (Conveniently enough, *The Grand Duel's* alternative English title was *The Big Showdown*.) And the sense that Clayton's past holds the key to Philip's predicament echoes *Death Rides a Horse*, another film in which the co-protagonists take turns playing cat and mouse.

There was much tilling of old ground in spaghetti westerns of the 70s (in truth, this situation existed well before then), and *The Grand Duel* is best approached as a kind of greatest hits package. The mystery angle, while not difficult to solve, was a hallmark of Gastaldi, who had already combined whodunit and western motifs in two scripts for the 'Sartana' series.

Like many of his contemporaries, the writer repeatedly used oppression as a theme. As well as *The Grand Duel*, he created tyrannical villains for 1966's *Blue Summer* AKA *Blood at Sundown* (*Perché uccidi ancora*), the film that introduced the name 'Sartana' (bestowed in that instance on Gianni Garko's heavy), and *One More to Hell* (*Uno di più all'inferno*, 1968). Portions of Luis Enriquez Bacalov's score have been used elsewhere: the trumpet procession that accompanies Philip to the gallows was composed for the 1966 western *Sugar Colt*, and the film's main theme was later resurrected by Quentin Tarantino for the anime section of *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003). In terms of visuals, the title sequence of Santi's film, which meticulously establishes setting and mood, and the build-up to the titular grand duel, betray the unmistakable influence of Sergio Leone.

It would have been strange had Santi *not* tipped his hat to the genre's greatest innovator. Along with the likes of Tonino Valerii, Franco Giraldi and Mario Caiano – each of whom made sterling contributions to the Eurowestern – Santi earned his spurs under Leone's tutelage. Having assisted the self-styled "comic anarchist" Marco Ferreri on four films, and Giulio Petroni on *Death Rides a Horse*, Santi performed the same function for Leone on *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (*Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*, 1966) and *Once Upon a Time in the West* (*C'era una volta il West*, 1968), and handled second-unit responsibilities on *A Fistful of Dynamite* AKA *Duck, You Sucker* (*Giù la testa*, 1971).

It has long been argued that Valerii's films were distinguished chiefly by their resemblance to those of Leone, and the same might be said of Santi's work on *The Grand Duel*. Indeed, the director admitted that he designed the film as a tribute to his mentor. Perhaps this was to be expected. As the story goes, Leone had tried to install Santi as his proxy in the director's chair for *A Fistful of*







*Dynamite*. When his main star, Rod Steiger, objected, Leone assured him that he wouldn't notice the difference. Steiger, of course, wasn't buying it, and Santi was denied his big chance.

Nobody should be surprised, then, by *The Grand Duel's* Leone-like rhythm, structure and texture – lengthy pauses and silences, imaginative framing (characters viewed through window frames and other apertures, forming screens within screens), stylistically distinctive flashbacks to the shooting of the patriarch at a railway station (colour desaturated almost to monochrome; the shooter's identity obscured by shadow and steam) and wide shots interspersed with jarring close-ups. These elements coalesce most impressively for the duel scene, which Santi stages with considerable panache. Clayton and the Saxon brothers adjourn to some cattle pens, pushing open creaking timber gates as they take up their positions, like partners in a deadly dance. The rhythmic choreography of duellists was another idea that originated with Leone and was refined by other filmmakers. Giuseppe Colizzi took it further than most, setting a saloon showdown to a Viennese waltz in his 1968 Hill/Spencer/Wallach hit *Revenge at El Paso* [*I quattro dell'Ave Maria*, AKA *Ace High*].<sup>1</sup> Master shots alternate with flashback footage and close-ups of eyes and itchy trigger fingers. To the strains of one of Bacalov's most haunting compositions the director quickens the pace, the duration of shots becoming progressively shorter as the moment of truth arrives. It is a textbook Italian western showdown – bordering on pastiche. Santi was certainly paying attention on the sets of those Leone films.

*The Grand Duel* was co-financed with French and German money and the main supporting roles reflect that investment. Cannes-born Dominique Darel, a model turned actress, made her debut, but completed only a handful of further films before dying in 1978, aged just 28. Her presence here is barely noticeable amid the testosterone. As was usually the case in Gastaldi-scripted westerns, it is the villains who stand out. They are played by two Germans, Klaus Grunberg and Horst Frank, and a Frenchman, Marc Mazza. Grunberg, dressed in an immaculate

white suit and gloves, with a patterned scarf and, oddly, prosthetic facial scabs (he is called “poxy” at one point), camouflages Adam's cruel streak behind effete mannerisms – equating homosexuality with sadism was nothing new for the genre.

The character is introduced in a scene that imitates the killing of Elisha Cook Jr. by Jack Palance in *Shane* (1953), and he later commits the film's most excessive act of violence, a machine-gun homage to *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, 1964) and *A Fistful of Dynamite*. The bald and physically imposing Mazza, meanwhile, plays most of his scenes with clenched teeth; he seems perpetually to be on the verge of punching somebody. His only other western appearance was literally ‘striking’, as a gunslinger slapped senseless by the quicksilver Terence Hill in Valerii and Leone's *My Name is Nobody* (*Il mio nome è Nessuno*, 1973).

Horst Frank is cast as Van Cleef's primary adversary. Born in Lubeck in 1929, this elegant actor was one of Germany's most precious gifts to the genre. His formative years were spent on the stage but, like his compatriot Klaus Kinski, he made most of his money in commercial co-productions aimed at the international market, and was already well known for duplicitous and villainous roles before westerns raised his profile outside his homeland. He stole his first major film in the genre, Mario Caiano's *Bullets Don't Argue* (*Le pistole non discutono*, 1964), where his mean-spirited outlaw has far more charisma than Rod Cameron's archaic Pat Garrett. (*Bullets'* historical significance rests on it being the senior partner in a two-picture arrangement that enabled Sergio Leone to use its sets, personnel and locations to make *A Fistful of Dollars*.)

With his disdainful and vaguely sinister demeanour, Frank's true metier was not so much playing characters wielding guns as embodying the lust for power behind them – in the 1968 films *Johnny Hamlet* (*Quella sporca storia nel west*); *Hate Thy Neighbour* (*Odia il prossimo tuo*), and *Django, Get a Coffin Ready* (*Preparati la bara!*), as in *The Grand Duel*, he is the orchestrator of violence, always projecting an air of decadence. With the ebbing of his film career he became a popular

<sup>1</sup> - The rhythmic choreography of duellists was another idea that originated with Leone and was refined by other filmmakers. Giuseppe Colizzi took it further than most, setting a saloon showdown to a Viennese waltz in his 1968 Hill/Spencer/Wallach hit *Revenge at El Paso* AKA *Ace High* (*I quattro dell'Ave Maria*).









media personality in Germany, where he divided his talents among television, poetry and spoken word.

*The Grand Duel* was shot mostly in Tuscany and on the outskirts of Rome (the waterfall where Clayton rescues Philip is in a park in Formello), with interiors filmed at the storied Elios studios, base for hundreds of spaghetti westerns since the mid-60s. The film was not very successful in Italy, and was not the springboard that Santi may have been hoping for.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he directed just two further titles. As for Lee Van Cleef, although he was not finished with Italian westerns (he even made a decent attempt at comedy, playing a happy-go-lucky outlaw in 1974's *Blood Money* AKA *The Stranger and the Gunfighter* [*El kárate, el Colt y el impostor*]), *The Grand Duel* represented a closing chapter in a sense.

It was the last of his films produced by Henryk Chroszicki and Alfonso Sansone of Sancro, the company that had reaped handsome rewards with *Day of Anger*, *Death Rides a Horse* and *Beyond the Law* – ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> respectively at the Italian box office in season 1967-68. Only the big-budget comedy westerns were comparably lucrative in the early-70s. The golden age had faded, but there is a kind of metaphorical afterglow about *The Grand Duel* – manifest in the magisterial bearing of Van Cleef, the outré villains, the confident reworking of conventions, the Leone-esque mise en scène – that makes it worthy of reappraisal. The curators of the 64<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival certainly thought so, selecting it alongside 30 others for a retrospective of Italian westerns in 2007.

*Kevin Grant is a film historian and lifelong aficionado of the western genre. He is a contributor to several film publications and the author of Any Gun Can Play: The Essential Guide to Euro-Westerns (FAB Press, 2011). In 2013 he sat on the jury of the Almería Western Film Festival.*

2 - According to *Dizionario del cinema italiano* (*Dictionary of Italian Cinema*, Vol. 4, ed. R. Puppi, M. Pecorari [Gremese, 2007]), *The Grand Duel*'s domestic box-office takings were £86 million. *Man of the East*, by contrast, earned £541 million. £ denotes Italian lire.



# ORIGINAL REVIEWS

compiled by Roberto Curti

Written by Ernesto Gastaldi and directed with a lack of consistency by the debuting Giancarlo Santi, *The Grand Duel* displays a strong imbalance between the verbose and slipshod first half, and a second part which is too dense and intricate (especially in its giallo overtones). The attempt at making a film in the vein of Sergio Leone is evident in a certain figurative baroque, stylised attitudes on the part of the characters (especially the villains), and distinctive "images from memory", iterated over and over. Even the music, by Sergio Bardotti, echoes typical Morricone motifs. The attempt, however, is purely academic, as well as rather risky and unsuccessful. Leading the cast is the by-now-familiar Lee Van Cleef, with his effective (albeit limited) range of expressions.

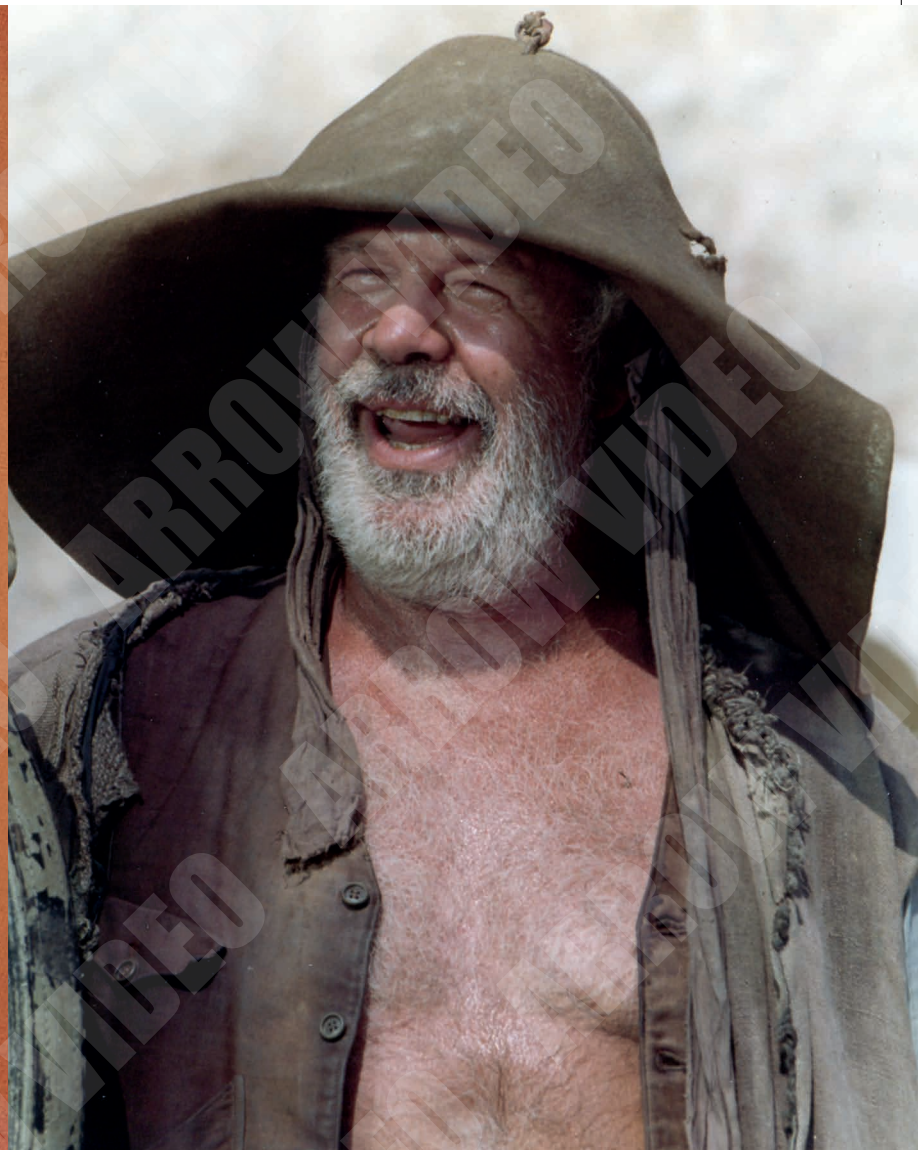
**Leonardo Autera, 'Due western all'italiana' in *Corriere della Sera*, 10 February 1973**

This colour western by Giancarlo Santi (Sergio Leone's ex-assistant) drags wearily along the thread of a boring plot which is neither here nor there. The only noteworthy characteristic of the story is that it manages to reach the utmost gratuitousness in not so long an arc of time.

**Unknown, 'Il grande duello' in *L'Unità*, 11 February 1973**

It is a European-made western, and totally derivative, in which everything pertains to the most worn-out repertoire of genre rip-offs. The director has lined up typical situations and cheaply sketched characters by the seat of his pants and has come up with a story lacking big surprises, despite the giallo elements in the second half. It must be conceded that, precisely because it is so predictable and conventional, the film might appeal to the most affectionate consumers of the genre, especially those who jump for joy when the film liberally offers nasty violence, brutalities, deafening shootouts and senseless killings. In both his looks and acting, Lee Van Cleef does what has already been seen and done.

**Achille Valdata, 'Bravo, sceriffo' in *Stampa Sera*, 12 February 1973**









# GAME OVER

(1984)

## CAST

Roger Mirmont  
Marc Mazza  
Roxanne Nouban

## CREW

Directed by **Bernard Villiot**  
Written by **Marc Druetz** and **Bernard Villiot**  
Director of Photography **Maurice Giraud**  
Music by **Bob Boisadan**  
Production Design by **Pascal Desgrippes** and **Christian Léotier**  
Editing by **Olivier d'Angely** and **Bernard Villiot**

## PLAY IT AGAIN MARC: BERNARD VILLIOT ON *GAME OVER*

When I decided to make this short film, I didn't know the actors well yet – it was my first directorial credit. I came across a picture of Marc Mazza, who immediately captivated me. I thought he had the physical characteristics for the role: an android.

The role was small and silent, and considering the films he had already done, I was expecting a rejection. However, I contacted him and when we subsequently met, I told him about my project and he immediately trusted me. I was co-writer, co-producer and director.

I really liked our meeting, Marc's attentive listening and his amused smile; no longer did I see the slightly disturbing expression that emanated from the photo with which I had selected him. Then everything went very quickly, with the urgency of a short film. Shooting at night; very few shots; discomfort for the actors without any complaints, playing the game as if it had been a comfortable feature film.

For the record, the three actors had never met and the first day of filming was at night, in the street scene that opens the film. We had installed the make-up boxes in the apartment of a neighbouring building, and the actors who came on the set by their own means were to be in this building. As she left the metro, Roxanne [Nouban], the actress, had the impression of being followed by a man. She looked discreetly over her shoulder to find Marc and his daunting appearance. Not reassured and believing herself to be truly followed, she hurried to the building... and the man entered too. I had shown a picture of Roxanne to Marc in our previous interview; he had recognised the actress. The situation made him laugh. He had fun and played a little before reassuring the actress once in the lobby.

That is to say that Marc is a great comedian and an exquisite person. We became friends and shared good moments for years. Apart from the nominations and awards this short film received, my best reward is that Marc has told me of his pride in having participated in this adventure, which life has made us foolishly lose sight of... my fault, no doubt. But having written these few words, I want to reconnect with him.



## ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*The Grand Duel (Il Grande Duello)* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with Italian and English mono audio. The original two-perf Techniscope 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan at Augustus Color, Rome. Picture restoration work was completed at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches, picture instability and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master at R3Store Studios, London.

The mono Italian and English language tracks were remastered from the optical sound negatives at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the dialogue was recorded entirely in post-production, as per the production standards of the period. Occasional instances of heavy flicker and damage remain, in keeping with the condition of the elements.

All original materials used in this restoration were made available by Surf Film and Augustus Color.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

### L'Immagine Ritrovata

Simone Arminio, Gilles Barberis, Valeria Bigongiali, Julia Mettenleiter, Alessia Navantieri, Charlotte Oddo, Caterina Palpacelli, Davide Pozzi, Elena Tammaccaro, Giandomenico Zeppa

### Augustus Color

Jacopo Pica, Maurizio Cisterna

### R3Store Studios

Jo Griffin, Gerry Gedge, Rich Watson, Nathan Leaman-Hill, Stephanie Mourey, Emily Kemp

### Surf Film

Stefania Carnevale

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Blackford**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Nick Mastrini**

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Artist **Matt Griffin**

Design **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Harald Buggenig, Roberto Curti, Chris Edwards, Austin Fisher, Ernesto Gastaldi, Manlio Gomasasca, Kevin Grant, Mike Malloy, Stephen Prince, Davide Pulici, John Robertson, Ettore Rosboch, Giancarlo Santi, Mike Siegel, Bernard Villiot





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