

# FULL METAL JACKET

"What have we got here? A fucking comedian, Private Joker."

---

## CASTING

Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* follows the story of Private J.T. Davis. We never hear him referred to by this name as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman gives him the nickname "Joker" at the beginning of the film. J.T. Davis is actually a reference to the first American casualty of the Vietnam War—Davis was killed in an ambush on December 22nd, 1961.<sup>1</sup> Private Joker was brought to life by the memorable performance of Matthew Modine who went on to appear in *47 Meters Down*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *Stranger Things*.

Kubrick's first choice to play Private Joker was Anthony Michael Hall, but "the talks went on too long."<sup>2</sup> Bruce Willis was also offered a role, but he was too busy with his television series, *Moonlighting*.<sup>2</sup> Modine became aware of the role when he was out to dinner with David Allen Grier in New York City and they saw Val Kilmer staring at them from across the room. Grier went over to ask what the problem was and Kilmer said he was annoyed



"Goodbye my sweetheart, hello Vietnam."

because he heard that Modine got cast in Stanley Kubrick's new movie about the Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> Modine had no idea what he was talking about or that he was even being considered, but thought that it would be a good idea to send Kubrick a tape of his recent performance in a movie called *Birdy* to see if he could get an audition.<sup>2</sup>

Author David Hughes said, “Matthew Modine was shooting *Birdy* at the time that Kubrick first expressed an interest in him and [director] Alan Parker sent Kubrick some taped material of Matthew Modine doing his actorly bit.”<sup>3</sup> After getting the role, Kubrick would later tell Modine that the clip almost destroyed his chances of being in the film. Kubrick said, “I couldn’t tell anything about you as an actor from the scene he chose. It was just two actors demonstrating that they could scream.”<sup>4</sup> However, there was a bit of a scene in a hospital on the tape where Modine doesn’t speak that got Kubrick interested.



*I wish I was in a Kubrick film...*

In a later interview, Kubrick said,

*Matthew Modine was perfect for the part. He’s a combination of sensitivity and macho virility. If Gary Cooper and Henry Fonda had a baby - it would be Matthew Modine.*<sup>5</sup>

## DIARY

When Modine arrived on the set, he had brought with him an old Rolleiflex camera

that was given to him by a friend. He knew that Kubrick had been a photographer and thought that it might help break the ice.<sup>6</sup> Kubrick told Modine that it would be good to keep a diary while working on the film to better get into the mind of a journalist for *Stars and Stripes*.<sup>2</sup> The Rolleiflex photos and diary are what make up Modine’s *Full Metal Jacket Diary*, which is a must-read for any FMJ fan. According to Modine, the diary he kept was the same one we see Joker taking notes with in the final film.<sup>6</sup>



*Dear diary, I’m acting in a scene right now.*

On August 24th, 1985, Modine writes,

*In three days, we finally begin filming. I’m going to keep this diary as a record of the thoughts of a character I’m playing named Joker. If I can just keep busy and focused on what it is I’m trying to create, I will be able to succeed as Joker—so far the most complex role I’ve ever played.*<sup>4</sup>

In the diary, we hear just how miserable it was making such a classic movie, including an instance in which the cold and windy England weather gave him windburn on his face and he accidentally made it much

worse by rubbing what he thought was lotion on his face. It was shampoo.<sup>4</sup>

## ACTING

Early on, Kubrick invited Modine to dinner at his house. They went out to his garden where Kubrick had Modine shoot a watermelon with a shotgun saying, “boys will be boys.”<sup>4</sup> I have to imagine this is Kubrick planting some of his themes into Modine’s mind indirectly.

Kubrick was known for not giving his actors much direction. He would often tell them to just come up with an interesting way to play the scene. At one point, Modine confessed to Kubrick that he felt like he didn’t know how to play Joker. In an interview, Modine explains this interaction:

*And I said, ‘I don’t... I feel like I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know what it is you want. I feel like I don’t know how to play Private Joker.’ And he kind of looked at me, pulled on his beard, and shut the car off, the Jeep. And he said, ‘I don’t want you to play anything. I just want you to be yourself.’<sup>6</sup>*

However, “being yourself” isn’t quite enough sometimes and this accounts for Kubrick’s reputation for doing many many takes. As Modine put it, Kubrick would say,

*Why do people always accuse me of doing so many takes and taking so long to make movies? It’s not my fault, it’s the actors. They never know their lines.<sup>6</sup>*

Kubrick wanted his actors to know their lines so well that they aren’t just reciting them. Instead, the words should be so ingrained in the actor’s mind that it’s just the natural thing to say. Sometimes it takes a hundred takes to get there.

On a particularly difficult day, Modine was caught without knowing the lines at all. There was a schedule change and Kubrick decided to shoot the Rifleman’s Creed scene where the recruits chant in unison, “This is my rifle, there are many like it, but this one is mine...” and so on. In order to shoot the scene, Kubrick would position the camera to focus on one of the main actors who would shout the creed with the background actors just mouthing the lines.<sup>4</sup>

This way, they would get a clean soundtrack and could then mix in the rest of the recruits later. Earlier, Kubrick recorded Modine reading the creed to a click-track meant to keep everyone in sync. Everyone had an earpiece playing Modine’s recording, so they knew what part of the creed to mouth.<sup>4</sup> Modine had to yell the lines, by himself, in front of everyone without really knowing it. Modine said,

*It’s really an embarrassing moment in my life. I will never show up on set and not know, like, the whole script, just in case they change the scenes, because it was really, really humiliating.<sup>6</sup>*



*... There are many like it, but this one is... line?*

## CONCLUSION

Matthew Modine had the tough job of being one of the only relatable Kubrick protagonists. Usually, Kubrick’s movies

follow a character who isn't the moral center of the film. The moral center of Kubrick's filmography is usually up to the audience. There isn't a Willem Dafoe or Charlie Sheen character from *Platoon* policing the bad behavior of fellow soldiers (or even just calling it out). We can infer that Joker is struggling with this. He beats a defenseless Private Pyle during the Blanket Party scene and he tends to just go along with the crowd. In his diary, Modine mentions Kubrick's direction to him during the scene in which a Vietnamese prostitute and pimp approach the group of soldiers who haggle on a price for the woman. The men revel in a setting where they can let their masculinity run amuck. It should be noted that many of the more extreme examples were eventually toned down in the final film.

Modine writes,

*Stanley doesn't want Joker observing, he wants him participating. So here we are—mankind at its best—killing, insulting, pillaging, raping. I think he really likes it—no, he just wants to expose it. See it. I believe that holding the mirror up to allow us to see our true reflections is Stanley's ultimate aim.<sup>4</sup>*



*Fun Fact: The actors are in the middle of a card game, so everyone has their cards in their pocket during each take.*

# Endnotes

- 1 Remembering SP4 James T. Davis, USA, KIA - Station HYPO - <https://bit.ly/2WFWaQH>
- 2 Full Metal Jacket and Its Troubled Production - Den of Geek - <https://bit.ly/2ZJvFfb>
- 3 [Featurette] Full Metal Jacket: Between Good and Evil
- 4 Full Metal Jacket Diary by Matthew Modine
- 5 Kubrick: The Definitive Edition by Michel Ciment (Pg 247)
- 6 Pinewood dialogue with Matthew Modine - <https://bit.ly/3fNPBmS>

# THANKS PATRONS!

S T

Hot Multimedia  
Cheryl Moch  
Zachary Sersland  
Micah RagingRiver  
Ryan Ellis  
Chien  
Nick Siegenthaler  
Lewis Peterson  
tam buriini  
Antonio T  
Quincy Battieste  
Mikey  
Mark Wiitanen  
rxl  
Ike  
John b  
Shaun Michael  
Eliades  
Mitchell Cait-  
Goldenthal  
Tom Vohasek  
tony scola  
Brandon  
Jeremy Bell  
The Geeky Amreeki  
Mannnaus  
Mauro Vargas  
Bradley  
Matt Dancer  
Martin Tower  
quirkformity  
Shane Reynolds  
Matt A  
Keith J Pickett  
james fentress  
Thibault Longuet  
peter ford  
IFCYG  
warren blyth  
Zeke  
Ville Peltonen  
Michael Andre

riggio037

James R. Miro  
Aj Salvo  
Johnny North  
MAOA  
Bill Banse  
COMICS IS DEAD  
Darren Simon  
Colin Christian  
Chris Markham  
Stephan Thien  
David Kehn  
Samuel McAlpine  
Richard Millett  
Simo Iiskola  
Jonathan Sklar  
Benkei Golden  
Eduardo Daniel  
Victoria  
Robert A Zeichick  
mike I  
Ugis Olte  
jaz h  
Paul Spence  
Darin Boville  
Christopher Urena  
Robin Block  
Kheng Lai Tan  
William Burke  
Adam  
Thomas Zenker  
Lamont Cranston  
Chad Jackson  
Ryan Razeghi  
Ricardo Montoya  
Make This Movie  
Konstantin Bredyuk  
Mohammed Taher  
Louis J Neumayer  
Matt Finnegan  
Frank Kuo  
Ross Colombo  
Zerj

Matthew Reyes

Niall Munnelly  
Christopher  
Wenham  
David H. Adler  
Agustin Herrera  
Andre K  
Leo Leigh  
Jimmy Durickas  
Ivar HEGGEN  
ZeosPantera  
Martin Forchemer  
chip moore  
Dillon Norton  
Tom Sheard  
J. D.  
Jonathan Starch  
Costas Stergiou  
Graeme Neil Reid  
ben hengst  
Jan van Huizen  
Andrew Benepe  
Dennis L Garling  
Ian Porter Phillips  
Ziad Shihab  
Sasha Koshman  
Glenn Wilkinson  
Caleb Mathre  
Lee Andrews  
Make Stuff  
Seth Lochhead  
Danial Sami  
Dale Strumpell  
Nikita Liamzine  
Rodrigo de Salvo  
Braz  
Alexander Kozlov  
Johnnathon  
Schroeder  
Anton Halldin  
FreeSir  
eumoria  
Alex M. Martinez

Rap Upz

Tom Xia  
Mårten Ferm  
Nico the Mexican  
Chino  
Chris Washburn  
Jakub Łabeński  
Fabian Gordon  
Denys Holovyanko  
Moez G Solis  
Phil Strahl a.k.a.  
Pixel Prophecy  
Ra Ra  
Hernan Marques  
Ned Price  
Alain  
Brendan Smith  
Beau Stucki  
woodruff phillips  
Nancy Corcoran  
James Mereness  
Vaucher Architekt  
Dianne Knudsen  
Paul Thomas  
Zach Shevich  
Taylor DeLuca  
James Webb  
Jeroen Houben  
Marshall Crawford  
Israel Storey  
Giant Sparkplug  
Steven Medcraft  
Kristi Delasia  
Steven Kinkead  
Aidan  
Markus Ploeckl