

HOME PAGE

THE RUMOR MILL

DOOGAN'S VIEWS

REVIEWS

CONTEST

UPCOMING DVD ART

FAQ & ARCHIVES

SURF THE LINKS

DVD DISCUSSION

ADVERTISE



page created: 9/8/04

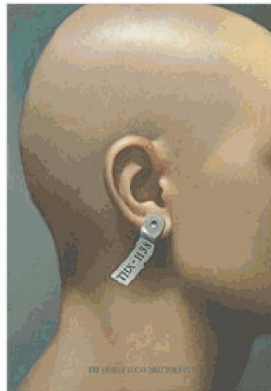
THX 1138: The George Lucas Director's Cut

Special Edition - 1971 (2004) - (American Zoetrope) Warner Bros.

review by Bill Hunt, editor of *The Digital Bits*



Site created 12/15/97.



Film Rating: A

Disc Ratings (Video/Audio/Extras): A/B+/A

Specs and Features

Disc One: The Film

88 mins, R, letterboxed widescreen (2.35:1), 16x9 enhanced, THX-certified, single-sided, RSDL dual-layered (layer switch at ??), digipack packaging, audio commentary (with writer/director George Lucas and co-writer/sound designer Walter Murch), **Theater of Noise** sound effects only track, scene-specific **Master Sessions with Walter Murch** video featurettes (available via branching option), [Easter egg](#), animated film-themed menus with sound and music, scene access (24 chapters), languages: English, French and Spanish (DD 5.1), subtitles: English, French and Spanish, Closed Captioned

Disc Two: Supplemental Material

A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope documentary (64 mins - 16x9, DD 2.0), **Artifact from the Future: The Making of THX 1138** documentary (31 mins - 16x9, DD 2.0), **Electronic Labyrinth THX 1138 4EB** - George Lucas' 1968 student film (15 mins - 4x3, DD 2.0), **BALD** classic production featurette (8 mins - 4x3, DD 2.0), original 1971 theatrical trailer (4x3, DD 2.0), 6 2004 re-release trailers (1 16x9, 5 4x3, all DD 2.0), [Easter egg](#), animated film-themed menus with sound and music, subtitles: none

"If you feel you are not properly sedated, call 348-844 immediately. Failure to do so may result in prosecution for criminal drug evasion."

In an uncertain future, THX 1138 (Robert Duvall) is struggling. He's a drug-controlled factory worker and consumer, like everyone else living in his underground society. Unlike the others, however, THX is beginning to feel emotions. His roommate, LUH 3417 (Maggie McOmie), is also experiencing emotions. She's in love with THX and has been deliberately weaning him off his daily regimen of drugs so that he might love her back. This eventually works, but along with love, they begin to feel fear, paranoia and dissatisfaction with their life as well. As THX and LUH struggle with these new emotions, it's only a matter of time before society discovers their deviant behavior... and reacts.

I have to say, I've always really liked this film. I would go so far as to say that I think it's director George Lucas' most interesting work. **THX** is something of a cautionary on society, but it also addresses the personal loss of identity and control of the individual in a modern, technological civilization. What is a single human being worth in the industrial, consumer world? Are we just cogs in an economic machine? Expendable employees if overhead gets too high? Consumers meant to define our lives and our personal happiness by the products we buy? These are interesting questions that are far more relevant now than they were back in 1971 when Lucas first asked them. Anyone who works for a large corporation knows the same pressures Robert Duvall's THX feels in this film: "Work hard. Increase production. Prevent accidents." Anyone who lives in the Western world is bombarded daily with a similar consumer message: "Buy more. Buy more now. Buy more and be happy." Are we not, almost every hour of every day, pummeled with advertisements telling us how to keep our hair from falling out longer, have harder dicks and softer, younger looking skin? It's almost scary how much TV ads these days sound like moments from **THX 1138**: "Ask your doctor about purple pill. If you have certain medical conditions, purple pill may be

the answer..."

For this DVD release, Lucas has restored and extended **THX 1138** in a new director's cut, in the same way that his **Star Wars** films have been enhanced with new CGI footage. The interesting thing here is, the new footage I think actually serves **THX 1138** better than it does the **Star Wars** films. Instead of just adding an eye-candy menagerie of strange creatures and alien vistas, the footage here mostly expands the sense of scale. For example, we now see the vastness of the factory floor at the beginning of **THX**, many more levels of hallways packed with ever more workers, and more vehicles moving around the underground complex. The film certainly works without this new footage, but I don't think it's really hurt by it either. **THX 1138** still retains its full share of foreboding and claustrophobia.

I still feel the same way about the original cut of **THX** as I do about the original cuts of the **Star Wars** films - Lucas has a responsibility to preserve them for film history. I have no problem with his new "ultimate versions." Lucas has a right to change his films until he's happy. By and large, I'm quite pleased with the revisions. At the same time, a whole generation of filmgoers first came to know these films in their original format. It's important for that original experience to be preserved... out of respect for the fans who have supported the films all these years, the artists who creatively invested themselves in the original work, and as a way to remind us all just how far the films have come since they were first released.

Moving on to the DVD itself, the image quality on this new 2-disc edition is absolutely spectacular. Presented in full anamorphic widescreen video, and fully digitally remastered and restored, this film has quite simply never looked better than it does here. There's not a speck of dust or dirt. Film grain is visible but minimal, allowing for plenty of image detail without a lick of unnecessary edge enhancement. Color and contrast are fantastic. It's hard to believe this is a film originally released in 1971 that was treated like a bastard stepchild by its studio.

The Dolby Digital 5.1 audio mix is also excellent. This is not the most active track in terms of surround sound panning or gimmickry. Instead, most of the action happens in the front portion of the sound stage, as it should. The result is fully appropriate to this particular film, allowing the new mix to retain all of the character of the original theatrical audio presentation. Where the surrounds do make themselves known is in atmospheric fill and creation of space. You'll hear the subtle tonal shifts as the film moves from environment to environment - cavernous spaces, long tunnels and hallways, etc. This mix serves the film well.

In addition to the film itself, Disc One includes some surprisingly good special features. The first of these is a fascinating audio commentary track with Lucas and co-writer/sound designer Walter Murch. I say fascinating, because this is a track in which both men talk a great deal about the specific intellectual ideas and concepts they were trying to convey - something I tend to prefer over the usual filmmaking "play by play" you get in so many commentaries these days. Lucas has a lot to say, and you can hear in his voice that he's very much invested in this film. I suspect that of all his films, this is the one he's most proud of (and rightly so).

Also included with the film on Disc One is an isolated audio track featuring just Murch's sound effects mix, as well as a branching video option that allows you to break out of the film from time to time to watch a featurette in which Murch discusses his audio work. Both offerings are interesting in their own right, and are well worth your time.

Disc Two features the real meat of the extras and, once again, every last bit of it is worth your attention. The fun starts with a truly great documentary on the early history of Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope studios, of which both Lucas and Murch were a part. The piece is narrated by Richard Dreyfuss and runs a little over an hour. It perfectly frames the end of one era in filmmaking - the old studio system - and the start of a new one. It tells the story of how Lucas, Coppola and company first met, and manages to capture not only the feeling of exciting possibility all those involved had at when they collectively left Hollywood to form their own independent filmmaking community, but also the fondness they all have looking back at this period of their lives. There are some great stories here - lots of candid talk, rare footage, fascinating moments and funny anecdotes. Zoetrope was composed of the best and brightest talents the USC and UCLA film schools could offer, each and every one full of piss and vinegar and ready to attack their craft with the full enthusiasm of youth. In addition to **THX 1138**, both **Apocalypse Now** and **The Conversation** emerged directly from this two-year period at Zoetrope. It's fascinating to think that had they played their cards differently, Warner Bros. might have continued to reap benefits of the collective talents of Coppola, Lucas, Murch, John Milius, Robert Dalva, Caleb Deschanel and others for years to come.

Next up on Disc Two is a good piece on the specific making of **THX 1138** - the history of the project, the context in which it was made, and the "duct tape and shoestrings" mentality of the people who made it. This was Lucas' first feature film and, ahead of its time though it was, it was ultimately rejected and compromised by the studio. As you can imagine, that experience had a powerful impact on the young Lucas... and the future direction his career would ultimately take. As with the Zoetrope piece, there are new interviews here with almost everyone involved including both Robert Duvall and Maggie McOmie, making for worthy viewing.

Perhaps the coolest extra on the disc is Lucas' original 1968 student film, **Electronic Labyrinth THX 1138 4EB**, upon which the feature film version would ultimately be based. I've seen a lot of student films in my day, and I can tell you that this 15-minute piece would stand out in film classes to this day. It's immediately clear upon watching this short that Lucas was very talented, very early in his career.

Also available here is a fascinating vintage featurette on the making of **THX** that's a bit experimental in its own right. It starts out with Coppola interviewing Lucas about his ideas for the film - a great and shameless bit of Zoetrope self-promotion you've just got to admire. Then it turns into this weird piece where the actors are taken out to odd public places around the Bay area to shave their heads for the film. It's just... well, it's **BALD** man. What more can you say?

Rounding out the bonus material is a set of trailers for **THX**, including the original 1971 trailer and 5 new

trailers created for the 2004 theatrical re-release. Only one is in anamorphic widescreen, which is perhaps the single flaw in this disc (and a minor one at that), but they're all cool in their own way. Finally, there's a nifty [Easter egg](#) hidden in the menus on this disc - Matthew Robbins' original 2-page treatment for **Breakout**, which was the inspiration for Lucas's student film.

I'll tell you, I've been looking forward to this special edition of **THX 1138** on DVD as much, if not more, than the **Star Wars Trilogy** discs. I'm pleased to say I wasn't disappointed. This 2-disc set is as thoughtful an examination of a fascinating film as you'll find, particularly these days when most of the Hollywood studios seem content to happily crank out one mindless, marketing-purposed, "Super Ultimate Explosivo Edition" DVD after another. There's not a single bonus item on this set that doesn't deserve to be here - it's all first rate stuff.

THX 1138 is old school Lucas, the way **Close Encounters** is old school Spielberg. After all these years, it's still a genuinely satisfying and thought-provoking experience - one that's even more relevant today than ever. I sincerely hope that when he's done with **Episode III** and all, Lucas goes back to his creative roots. I hope he's got a few more films like **THX** left in him. Because if he does... you can bet I'll stand in line to see them.

Bill Hunt
billhunt@thedigitalbits.com



Easter egg Instructions

Disc One

To access DVD production credits, select the zoetrope icon on the main menu and press "enter".

Disc Two

To access Matthew Robbins' 2-page treatment for **Breakout** (upon which Lucas' student film **Electronic Labyrinth THX 1138 4EB** was based), go to the credits page and navigate "right" with your remote. A face will appear. Press "enter".



Site designed for 1024 x 768 resolution, using 16M colors and .gif 89a animation.
© 1997-2002 The Digital Bits, Inc., All Rights Reserved. billhunt@thedigitalbits.com