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Warner Home Video presents

THX 1138: The George Lucas Director's Cut (2-Disc Special Edition) (1971)

"Let us be thankful we have an occupation to fill. Work hard, increase production, prevent accidents and be happy."

- **Voice of the state**

Review By: Matt Peterson

Published: September 12, 2004

Stars: Robert Duvall, Donald Pleasence

Other Stars: Don Pedro Colley, Maggie McOmie, Ian Wolfe

Director: George Lucas

MPAA Rating: R for some sexuality/nudity

Run Time: 01h:28m:22s

Release Date: September 14, 2004

UPC: 085391116226

Genre: sci-fi

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Style Grade	Substance Grade	Image Transfer Grade	Audio Transfer Grade	Extras Grade	Member Comments
A	A-	A	B+	A	0

DVD Review

George Lucas has always been ahead of his time, occasionally to the chagrin of filmgoers. His current digital revolution is cinematically significant; digital is a wonderful format that allows filmmakers to create without the expensive lab costs and lighting considerations associated with film. At the same time, his attitude toward the medium is one of exclusivity, seemingly bent on making film obsolete altogether. In the 1960s, he was on a different kind of cutting edge, banding with fellow film school rebels to form American Zoetrope. His first feature under their youthful banners contained the marks of a bold, little seen side of Lucas, expanded from his short student film of a similar name. The result is startling.

In the future, the government controls mind, body, and spirit. Human beings are essentially machines, controlled by a constant stream of sedating drugs. They wander apathetic through their industrial jobs, all the while encouraged by a Byzantine visage of Jesus to consume, buy, and avoid accidents. THX 1138 (Robert Duvall) is beginning to feel different, not fully adhering to the precepts of this sterile society; this frightens him. His life of conformity is slowly beginning to decay, and he is sure of the reason: he is in love with his roommate, LUH 3417 (Maggie McOmie). Her feelings are mutual, and the two begin a forbidden affair. In strict Orwellian fashion, the two are promptly discovered and separated.

THX's long rehabilitation is under way. In an infinite expanse of white, he is forced to become reacquainted with the legally mandated sedatives, along with a group of fellow "felons." Among them is SEN 5241 (Donald Pleasence), who was instrumental in THX's initial capture. He too has departed from the ways of the state, and his blathering ideas suggest rebellion, though he does not have the courage to make it happen. THX is the hero destined to take a stand, and soon he is off on an unprecedented quest to rescue his love and free himself from the bonds of a society bent on efficiency, budgets, and the obliteration of original ideas.

Where has this Lucas gone? Outraging executives due to its diverging course from the standard studio fare of the time, this is an innovative, exemplary vision that shows a unique, offbeat side of Lucas that has been missing since. Granted, I love **Star Wars** and all of its swashbuckling glory, but this is in many ways more

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sophisticated and engaging. As my credo for this genre reads, good science fiction must begin with an idea, or an issue that is to be explored in a new context. Clearly ahead of its time, **THX 1138** speaks to the dangers of technology run rampant and an decreasingly interpersonal consumerism, with echoes of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. These are ideas that are clearly beginning to manifest in our world, but in the late 1960s, when computers still filled entire rooms, these were relatively new notions, perhaps only preceded by Eisenhower's caution against the "military industrial complex."

Robert Duvall brings a chilling intensity that becomes a beacon of the human spirit, recalling various aspects of his performance in **Tomorrow**, minus the Faulkner Southern drawl. Donald Pleasance and his fellow city dwellers and wonderfully schizophrenic, babbling a kind of gibberish that on the surface seems to make sense, but upon closer examination is little more than the verbal leakage of a deviant mind. Still, there are glimmers of individual thought that peer through, and this is the point. The chatter that fills the film's meticulously designed soundtrack has a kind of lyrical quality that effectively accompanies the stark visuals. When viewing the film, I thought to myself "this really isn't much of a script." Mostly composed of this technobabble, there is little more. However, the concept is what drives the narrative, and the gibberish contributes to the environment, which is integral to the film's message.

The "George Lucas Director's Cut" has some new CGI shots, clearly intended to increase the scale and make the setting more grand than its original, limited visuals. These shots are well done, but scream "I was made in 2004!" when they appear, especially some very dynamic shots added to the car chase. They can be effective, but the film would be fine without them; the original cut should have been included not only for historical reasons, but out of respect for **THX**'s fans. I have the same gripe with the forthcoming release of the **Star Wars** trilogy. It's great to have **THX 1138** on disc, but it seems revising history is a dark prophecy of the future that Lucas is making manifest today.

Rating for Style: A

Rating for Substance: A-

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Image Transfer

	One
Aspect Ratio	2.35:1 - Widescreen
Original Aspect Ratio	yes
Anamorphic	yes

Image Transfer Review: Warner's THX-approved, digitally restored transfer is fantastic. The image contains no major blemishes, showing good detail, rock solid colors and most importantly, good contrast. Fine grain is present here and there, but this is to be expected. Edge enhancement is nonexistent, though the newly created VFX elements look almost too clean. Bottom line: **THX 1138** has never looked this good.

Image Transfer Grade: A

Audio Transfer

	Language	Remote Access
Dolby Digital 5.1	English, French, Spanish	yes

Audio Transfer Review: The Dolby 5.1 audio is appropriately front-centered for most of the film. Surrounds are engaged to support the musical score and the occasional ambient or directional effect (especially during the car chase). LFE kicks in nicely when needed. This is a clearly updated, but not excessive surround mix.

Audio Transfer Grade: B+

Disc Extras

Full Motion menu with music
 Scene Access with 24 cues and remote access
 Subtitles/Captions in English, French, Spanish with remote access
 1 Original Trailer(s)
 5 Other Trailer(s) featuring **THX 1138** 2004 re-release trailers
 Isolated Music Score with remote access
 2 Documentaries
 1 Featurette(s)

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1 Feature/Episode commentary by Co-Writer/Director George Lucas and Co-Writer/Sound Designer Walter Murch
Packaging: 2 disc slip case
Picture Disc
2 Discs
1-Sided disc(s)
Layers: RSDL

Extra Extras:

1. *Theatre of Noise* Experience: Isolated music and sound effects track with *Master Sessions*, branching video segments showcasing Murch's pioneering work
2. **Electronic Labyrinth THX 1138 4EB**, Lucas' original student film

Extras Review: The two-disc "special edition" contains some great extras. First is a commentary by George Lucas and co-writer/sound designer Walter Murch. This is an engaging track that delves into the films conceptual ideas as opposed to its more technical aspects. The pair is still enthusiastic about this work; Lucas is especially proud, hinting he would like to return to this kind of filmmaking. Bring it on, George.

Next is the *Theatre of Noise* experience, which is composed of two features: an isolated musical score and sound effects track is available in Dolby 5.1, along with optional *Master Sessions* with Walter Murch, which are branching video segments. These bits are accessible through selecting an icon that appears during the film, or separately through a submenu. There are 13 segments in all, in which Murch discusses the background behind various elements of the film's amazing soundtrack.

Disc Two has even more to offer. *A Legacy of Filmmakers: The Early Years of American Zoetrope* (01h:03m:31s) is a fascinating, comprehensive look at the young USC/UCLA film school grads who had the bold idea to create a filmmaking community outside the reach of the all-encompassing studio system. Comments from such figures as George Lucas, Walter Murch, John Milius, Caleb Deschanel, Martin Scorsese, and of course, founder Francis Ford Coppola detail the rise and fall of their dream. This is a well assembled piece that combines archival footage and new interviews. Portions reflect on Coppola's relationship with the opposite-minded Lucas, and the failure of **THX 1138**; a "must-watch" for indie filmmakers and students alike.

Artifact from the Future: The Making of THX 1138 (31m:04s) is a newly produced behind-the-scenes documentary detailing the production. Comments from Lucas, Robert Duvall, Maggie McOmie and others provide a substantive look into the film's conception and execution. There is even some archival footage of the main actors having their heads shaved (to be expanded later...); those Zoetrope folks filmed everything. Both of these documentaries are presented in anamorphic widescreen.

George Lucas' original student film, **Electronic Labyrinth THX 1138 4EB** (15m:07s), is included. The image quality shows the limitations of its shooting format, but is rather clean. Lucas' talent for visuals clearly shows throughout this unconventional film, which contains no character dialogue, but manages to tell a complete story through images and background chatter. I always enjoy seeing major directors' student films, and this is no exception.

A vintage production featurette entitled *Bald* (08m:01s) is also present. This is a unique little self-promo piece meant to catalog Zoetrope's first major feature film. It begins with a serious narration introducing Coppola, who interviews Lucas about his ideas behind the film, feigning ignorance along the way. It then bursts headlong into a head-shaving fest. The title is fitting, no doubt.

A gallery of trailers contains the original 1971 trailer and five trailers for **THX 1138**'s 2004 re-release. Finally, there is an easter egg of Matthew Robbins' original two-page treatment entitled "Breakout," which was the basis for Lucas' student film. It can be found by clicking right while on the DVD credits page of Disc 2.

All of these great extras along with some sweet, subtle cover art; clearly, this two-disc set is well worth the extra change.

Extras Grade: A

Final Comments

George Lucas' visionary first film shows a uniquely offbeat, unconventional side that has been all but missing since. Stunning visuals and challenging themes are present, coupled with some newly-created special effects. Warner's two-disc version contains THX-approved a/v quality and fluff-free supplements. This is a "must-have", ready for consumption by the masses.

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