
"IT'S A POWERHOUSE RETURN TO OSCARS FORM FOR RUSSELL CROWE."
THE NEW ZEALAND HERALD
A JAMES VANDERBILT FILM
ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER RUSSELL CROWE
ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER RAMI MALEK
LEO WOODALL
JOHN SLATTERY
MARK O'BRIEN
WITH ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE RICHARD E. GRANT
AND ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE MICHAEL SHANNON
INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS
NUREMBERG
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In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, as the world grapples with the unveiled horrors of the Holocaust, U.S. Army psychiatrist Lt. Col. Douglas Kelley (Rami Malek) is assigned the extraordinary task of assessing the mental state of Hermann Göring (Russell Crowe), the notorious former Reichsmarschall and Hitler's second in command, along with other high-ranking Nazi officials.

As the Allies – led by the unyielding chief U.S. prosecutor, Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson (Michael Shannon) alongside Sgt. Howie Triest (Leo Woodall), David Maxwell-Fyfe (Richard E. Grant), Gustave Gilbert (Colin Hanks), Col. John Amen (Mark O'Brien) and Burton C. Andrus (John Slattery) – navigate the monumental task of creating an unprecedented international tribunal to ensure the Nazi regime answers for its atrocities, Kelley gets to know his 'patients'. But he soon finds himself locked in a psychological duel with Göring, whose charisma and cunning reveal a sobering truth: that ordinary men can commit extraordinary evil.

About the Production

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"The privilege of opening the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the world imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated. That four great nations, flushed with victory and stung with injury, stay the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that Power has ever paid to Reason."

JUSTICE ROBERT H. JACKSON

Opening Statement at the Nuremberg Trials, November 21 1945

(excerpted throughout)

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Led by Academy Award winners Russell Crowe and Rami Malek, and Oscar nominee Michael Shannon, NUREMBERG is a compelling thriller centered on the establishment of the historic trials that prosecuted members of the Nazi high command for their war crimes during the Second World War. Written and directed by James Vanderbilt (TRUTH, ZODIAC) and adapted from Jack El-Hai's acclaimed non-fiction work, THE NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST, NUREMBERG follows army psychiatrist Lt. Col. Douglas Kelley (Malek) as he evaluates the psychological fitness of detained Nazi officials, including former Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring (Crowe). Concurrently, Supreme Court Associate Justice Robert H. Jackson (Shannon), taking on the extraordinary task of prosecuting the men responsible for the crimes of the Third Reich, works to develop the foundational legal and ethical standards for this unprecedented international tribunal.

Also forming NUREMBERG's heavyweight ensemble are Leo Woodall as Sgt. Howie Triest, the German-speaking attaché assigned to Kelley to translate; Richard E. Grant as Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, the British prosecutor; Colin Hanks as Dr. Gustave Gilbert, the rival psychologist brought in to reevaluate Kelley's conclusions; Mark O'Brien as Col. John Amen, who served as the interrogator-in-chief for the U.S. prosecution team; and John Slattery as Col. Burton C. Andrus, who runs the Nuremberg prison in which the captured Nazis are held.

NUREMBERG's all-star ensemble extends behind the scenes, too. Oscar nominee Dariusz Wolski (NEWS OF THE WORLD, THE MARTIAN) is the film's director of photography, production design is by four-time Oscar nominee Eve Stewart (THE KING'S SPEECH, LES MISERABLES, THE DANISH GIRL), hair and make-up design is by BAFTA nominee Jan Sewell (BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY, THE DANISH GIRL), costume design is by Bartholomew Cariss (CHURCHILL), and the casting director is John Papsidera (OPPENHEIMER, YELLOWSTONE). Oscar nominee Tom Eagles (JOJO RABBIT, THE BOOK OF CLARENCE) serves as editor, and Brian Tyler (CRAZY RICH ASIANS, AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON) is the film's composer.

The movie is produced by Richard Saperstein, Bradley J. Fischer, James Vanderbilt, William Sherak, and Walden Media's Frank Smith, Benjamin Tappan and Cherilyn Hawrysh, alongside István Major of Filmsquad and George Freeman. Executive producers include Brooke Saperstein, Annie Saperstein, Beau Turpin, W. Porter Payne Jr., Jack El-Hai, Paul Neinstein, and Széchenyi Funds' Géza Deme and Tamás Hajnal.

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"This Tribunal, while it is novel and experimental, is not the product of abstract speculations nor is it created to vindicate legalistic theories. This inquest represents the practical effort of four of the most mighty of nations, with the support of 15 more, to utilize international law to meet the greatest menace of our times: aggressive war. The common sense of mankind demands that law shall not stop with the punishment of petty crimes by little people. It must also reach men who possess themselves of great power and make deliberate and concerted use of it to set in motion evils which leave no home in the world untouched. It is a cause of this magnitude that the United Nations will lay before Your Honors."

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A GRIPPING HISTORY

At the end of the Second World War, after the defeat of the Axis powers and Adolf Hitler's suicide, the Allies were faced with answering a difficult question: what to do about the surviving members of the Nazi regime that had been captured in the liberation of Europe. Winston Churchill wanted to shoot them, and Joseph Stalin wanted a show trial that would by default lead to shooting them, while the newly inaugurated U.S. President Harry S Truman insisted on a real trial to bring them to justice. The answer, ultimately, was as unprecedented as the crimes themselves: to hold an international tribunal at Nuremberg, a city synonymous with the rise of the Third Reich, having served as the backdrop for Hitler's propaganda rallies.

But it was not a decision reached lightly. The Allied countries – the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and France – faced significant legal, ethical, and logistical challenges in their pursuit of justice. The notion of an international criminal court had yet to exist; there was simply no template for prosecuting a regime for crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, wars of aggression, and conspiracy. The world had never attempted to put an entire leadership on trial for orchestrating atrocities on such a monstrous scale.

Led by United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Robert H. Jackson, the Allies set to work establishing a framework for a trial. And into this charged atmosphere stepped Lt. Col. Douglas Kelley, a quietly resolute U.S. Army psychiatrist tasked with a mission that was as novel as it was urgent. Kelley's assignment was to probe the minds of the captured Nazi hierarchy – men whose decisions had devastated continents and annihilated millions.

The Allies understood that justice at Nuremberg would not only be measured by verdicts and sentences, but by a deeper reckoning with the roots of evil itself. Was the monstrosity of the Nazi regime the product of singularly deranged minds, or could ordinary men be seduced by ideology and ambition into perpetrating unthinkable acts? The world demanded answers.

Kelley's evaluations were critical for several reasons. First, there was a procedural necessity: the tribunal required confirmation that the defendants were competent to stand trial, able to comprehend the proceedings and participate in their own defense. One defendant was excluded for failing health and age. But beyond the legal framework, there was a psychological imperative. By understanding the mental states and motivations of men like Hermann Göring and his cohorts, Kelley sought to illuminate how such atrocities could happen – not just for the sake of the court, but for the sake of our common humanity. Could a psychiatric lens help the world recognize warning signs, and forestall future horrors?

Kelley relied on a combination of psychiatric interviews, personality assessments, and direct observation of the prisoners. He meticulously questioned the defendants to gauge their understanding of the charges, their emotional responses to their actions, and their ability to participate in the legal process.

Kelley also administered standardized psychological tests, including intelligence and personality inventories, aiming to detect any signs of mental illness or cognitive impairment. In addition, he observed the prisoners' behavior in the controlled environment of the jail, paying close attention to their interactions, coping mechanisms, and responses to the stress of impending judgment.

As Kelley began his interviews, he encountered a spectrum of personalities – some defiant, others broken, many disturbingly banal. Yet it was his encounters with Göring, the unapologetic architect of terror, that would become a focal point of the psychological drama unfolding at Nuremberg. In seeking an answer to how evil takes root, Kelley's work became not just an act of medical assessment, but a crucial chapter in humanity's attempt to understand itself.

For writer and director James Vanderbilt, who learned about Kelley's work in the pages of an article and a book proposal from author Jack El-Hai that would become the bestselling THE NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST, the psychological and political machinations of Nuremberg became an undeniable fascination. Vanderbilt was captivated by the extraordinary intersection of history and human inquiry - a moment when the fate of the world's most notorious war criminals depended not only on armies, or laws that had yet to be written, but on the fragile complexities of the mind.

What thrilled him as a filmmaker was the way El-Hai's book peeled back the legal proceedings to reveal a gripping, intimate battle of wits between Kelley and the men he evaluated, most notably Göring. "Immediately, I thought, Oh, that's a movie," says Vanderbilt. "I'd never seen anything like it explored before, and I didn't even know what the state of psychiatry was during World War II."

Beyond his fascination with the psychological dimensions of Nuremberg, Vanderbilt was also propelled by a deep, personal sense of generational responsibility – a responsibility shaped by the ever-widening gap between the world of living memory and that of distant history. He reflected on the profound shift that has taken place as the direct witnesses of World War II fade from the collective stage, leaving their stories at risk of slipping into abstraction for new generations. The war, once a vivid reality for so many, now risks becoming little more than a chapter in a school textbook, its moral questions and human drama flattened by the passage of time.

“My grandparents fought in World War II, and I grew up hearing about it as a piece of living history,” he explains. Today, he finds himself grappling with a new challenge: “When I talk to my children about World War II now, it’s like talking to them about the Civil War. It feels so far removed for them, so it felt important to keep the stories of that time alive.”

Douglas Kelley ultimately reached a profoundly unsettling conclusion: the Nazi leaders, including Göring, were not clinical psychopaths or monsters in any medical sense. Rather, they were disturbingly ordinary men – shrewd, ambitious, and fully rational, yet capable of orchestrating unspeakable crimes under the right conditions.

This diagnosis challenged the world’s desperate need for simple answers or comfortable categories of good and evil. Kelley’s assertion that monstrous acts could emerge from ordinary individuals provoked fierce controversy among his contemporaries, many of whom recoiled from the idea that the line between good and evil was so fragile and human.

At Nuremberg, he was soon replaced by the psychologist Gustave Gilbert, who concluded that the Nazi leaders exhibited profound moral and emotional deficits – qualities he regarded as pathological and emblematic of an innate capacity for evil. As the world sought to come to terms with the legacy of Nuremberg, it was Gilbert’s damning psychological portraits that captured public attention and ultimately shaped the prevailing narrative. Gilbert’s perspective resonated with a public eager for clear moral boundaries, and his subsequent writings, particularly his detailed diaries, became touchstones for understanding the Nazi psyche.

Kelley, by contrast, saw his more nuanced conclusions pushed to the margins. As Gilbert’s views took hold and were widely publicized, Kelley’s own reputation and sense of mission seemed to erode. In a chilling echo of the very men he had studied, Kelley ultimately took his own life in 1958 by ingesting cyanide - the same lethal substance Hermann Göring had used within hours of his scheduled execution.

“Nobody escapes from war unaffected,” notes Vanderbilt. “You can’t ignore what happened to Douglas Kelley at the end of his life. It’s such a deliberate thing that it’s hard not to see some kind of symbolism in what happened to him.”

Intent on adapting El-Hai’s book, Vanderbilt soon determined that the narrative should center not on Kelley’s entire biography, but rather on this specific period of his life, and the bigger picture surrounding it. This approach allowed Vanderbilt to incorporate Robert Jackson’s efforts in organizing the trials and provide a more comprehensive view of this singular event in history.

“I made a decision very early on that the story I wanted to tell was the story of what happened to Kelley in Europe,” Vanderbilt explains. “Jack’s book covers his entire life in a beautifully written way, but Robert Jackson’s storyline is not in the book. As I continued my research, the story grew and grew. I knew I needed to keep the guardrails up on what we were going to portray in the film.”

Central to Vanderbilt’s task was a preoccupation with the enduring lessons the events at Nuremberg sought to impart – those that resonated, those that faded, and those now drifting toward oblivion. “Evil isn’t always going to put on a scary uniform,” Vanderbilt says. “It’s not always going to announce itself. It can be insidious. It can be – as Göring was – the nicest guy at the dinner party. That’s a much scarier thought than good guys versus bad guys.”

Through this lens, Vanderbilt set out to illuminate the subtle, chilling ways darkness can infiltrate the ordinary, entertaining audiences with a remarkable true story, while challenging them to confront the discomforting fragility of moral boundaries.

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"In the prisoners' dock sit twenty-odd broken men. Reproached by the humiliation of those they have led almost as bitterly as by the desolation of those they have attacked, their personal capacity for evil is forever past. It is hard now to perceive in these miserable men as captives the power by which as Nazi leaders they once dominated much of the world and terrified most of it. Merely as individuals, their fate is of little consequence to the world. What makes this inquest significant is that those prisoners represent sinister influence that will lurk in the world long after their bodies have returned to dust. They are living symbols of racial hatreds, of terrorism and violence, and of the arrogance and cruelty of power."

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THE JOURNEY TO SCREEN

"I often get asked what the hardest script I ever wrote was, and it's usually the one I'm currently working on," quips Vanderbilt. "But I will say NUREMBERG was particularly challenging, because the story kept growing."

The story of Douglas Kelley had first been brought to him by producer Bradley J. Fischer. While producing the Martin Scorsese film SHUTTER ISLAND Fischer stumbled onto El-Hai's book THE LOBOTOMIST, which he went on to option and set up as a series at HBO. So, when El-Hai finished writing his new work THE NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST for Scientific American magazine, Fischer was one of the first producers with whom he shared it, along with his plans to expand it into a book.

"Jack has an extraordinary knack for finding these old tales that have been lost to the pockets of history," says Fischer, who had particularly responded to the cat-and-mouse game played by Kelley and Goring. "There was this incredible sense of manipulation that occurred between them. Kelley was starstruck by this guy, and Göring latched onto that for his own benefit. There was great tension in the story between them, and a lot of fascinating, terrifying levels to unpack. To find that kind of drama enshrined within a relatively obscure chapter of the history of WWII – between the capture of what remained of the Nazi High Command and their trial by the Allies at Nuremberg – was a profoundly rare opportunity to me, as a film producer."

Vanderbilt, known to his collaborators as Jamie, immediately saw the same potential. Sparked to the possibility of bringing this lost story to the screen, he plunged into years of rigorous research on Kelley and the trials, immersing himself in archives, court transcripts, memoirs, and the entwined lives of the people at the heart of Nuremberg.

As he worked to refine the screenplay, it became clear to him that the complexity of these events could not be captured by focusing solely on the psychological chess match between Kelley and Göring. Vanderbilt felt compelled to broaden the narrative's scope and weave in other pivotal figures whose actions and perspectives shaped the course of history. Among them, chief prosecutor Robert Jackson, whose impassioned drive established the very framework of the trials, and his British counterpart David Maxwell-Fyfe; Col. Burton Andrus, the warden tasked with the daunting responsibility of guarding the Nazi defendants; and psychologist Gustave Gilbert, whose own

interpretations of evil stood in sharp contrast to Kelley's. Each of them became essential threads in the tapestry Vanderbilt sought to weave.

"Initially, I thought the film might be about two men in a cell, because just reading Jack's book, there's already so much depth in there," Vanderbilt notes. "But as I read Douglas Kelley's book, 22 CELLS AT NUREMBERG, and looked at his observations of the men he studied, I started researching the trials themselves, and the scope just kept growing. When I read Robert Jackson's story, and how he and Kelley intersected, I knew the movie had to include it."

Vanderbilt was struck by the monumental efforts of Robert Jackson in laying the foundations of the International Military Tribunal, better known as the Nuremberg Trials. He felt it essential that the screenplay not only highlight Jackson's legal prowess but also chronicle the tireless journey that took him from the corridors of Washington to diplomatic meetings in London and even the halls of the Vatican. By tracing Jackson's travels and relentless negotiations, Vanderbilt sought to capture the extraordinary international coalition-building required to bring the architects of atrocity to justice – an odyssey as dramatic and consequential as anything that transpired inside the courtroom itself.

It was during his exhaustive research that Vanderbilt also stumbled upon the remarkable story of Sgt. Howie Triest – a young German Jewish émigré who, having fled the Nazis as a boy, returned to Europe in a U.S. Army uniform to serve as an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. Vanderbilt was captivated by the tragic arc of Triest's family: Howie's escape from Germany, the loss of loved ones to the Holocaust, and his improbable return to the very heart of postwar justice. The weight of Triest's perspective proved irresistible to Vanderbilt, who recognized that weaving Howie's singular vantage point into the script would deepen the film's emotional resonance and illuminate the trials from a profoundly personal lens.

But as Vanderbilt wove together the disparate strands, he found himself confronted by the enormity of synthesizing so many vantage points into a coherent whole. Each narrative thread threatened to pull the film in a different direction, demanding that the structure stretch and contort beyond the boundaries of conventional screenwriting. It became clear that capturing the true magnitude and nuance of the Nuremberg story meant relinquishing the safety of tidy, three-act formulas. Instead, Vanderbilt embraced a messier, more organic approach, accepting that the truth of history, with all its interwoven complexities, could not – and should not – be forced to fit the established rules of cinematic storytelling.

"It's sort of wonderful and terrifying not to have the traditional, three-act structure," laughs Vanderbilt. "I suppose I'm attracted to movies that don't hit every beat the way you're supposed to, but it is nerve-wracking."

Fortunately, Vanderbilt is no stranger to such unconventional structures, having worked to adapt Robert Graysmith's book about the Zodiac killer for David Fincher's 2007 masterpiece ZODIAC. Among its quirks, the fact that the two lead characters don't meet until the halfway point of the narrative mirrors itself in NUREMBERG with Kelley and Jackson's late first encounter. "Doing ZODIAC gave me some confidence that I might know how to build this. Once I determined the movie would be about these three men, and we were going to follow them wherever they might go, that built the structure for me."

"One of the things Jamie really latched onto, I think in a similar way to ZODIAC, was to look at the procedure of the trials – how the sausage really got made," notes Fischer, who had produced Fincher's film. "I credit Jamie with pulling open other history books and getting into Robert Jackson's story; the onus Jackson took upon himself and his team to pave the way for international law."

For his part, author Jack El-Hai appreciated Vanderbilt's talent for finding new angles in Kelley's story. "The mental adjustment I made when I optioned the book was that it wasn't my story anymore," says El-Hai, who visited the film's set during production and was always on hand as a resource for Vanderbilt and the cast and crew. "I concluded my book is what it is, and that will never change, and that it's wonderful to have somebody like Jamie, with a creative vision, to tease out other things from this story, and to expand the scope."

Key in Vanderbilt's mind was the idea that he wanted to create an accessible retelling of this history. "It was important to me that the movie not overstay its welcome," he says. "I wanted it not to feel like medicine. I wanted it to be entertaining. It deals with some really serious themes, but a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down."

Says Rami Malek, who would eventually be cast to play Douglas Kelley, "Jamie writes with great structure and rhythm, and he finds that thrilling quality we saw in ZODIAC. There's also a dry sense of humor that is a thread throughout this entire film, because it's a story about human beings, and in certain circumstances humans must find their own ways to escape the horrors. The way Jamie threads that needle so finely and elegantly, with characters you can root for in every corner of the film, is extraordinarily unique to him."

"It feels very human and familiar," confirms producer Richard Saperstein. "There's a lightness, and a sense of intimacy, in spite of the fact that Jamie is also able to pull back and give us the scope of it."

Long before his official involvement, Saperstein had encountered Vanderbilt's script and found himself captivated both by its accessibility and its unorthodox approach to telling the story of Nuremberg. Though years passed before an opportunity arose, the screenplay lingered in his mind. When the chance partner on the project finally presented itself in 2022, Saperstein seized it without hesitation.

"When this script came along, it really struck all the right chords with me," notes Saperstein, who runs Bluestone Entertainment. "You always have a long memory for scripts that are this good that you read but that haven't yet gotten made. And NUREMBERG was always high on that list. I had one of our executives look into it, and sure enough, it was available again."

He was excited for Vanderbilt to mark his second directorial outing with NUREMBERG, after 2015's TRUTH. "This is a big movie to entrust to someone who had only directed one feature," Saperstein says. "But from my conversations with him, I felt he had the right handle on it, and from the first day of prep it was clear he has a wonderful ability to harness his collaborators for the vision in his mind for the movie."

It always starts from the top, says Russell Crowe, who would become the first cast member to sign on. Crowe notes that Vanderbilt's commitment to the project reflected on every department. "Jamie has been a writer for other people, and he's seen his ideas shaped by other people. That creates a level of determination within an artist, that when he gets that opportunity to direct, he knows what he wants to create."

"Jamie's energy is so infectious," confirms Leo Woodall, who plays Sgt. Howie Triest in NUREMBERG. "He's just so happy to be doing what he's doing, but he's also a leader and he runs the show."

Crowe takes the time to praise Saperstein too, for what he says is an environment that encourages the best of every collaborator. "At the highest level of producing, you're a curator, and there's an intimacy and care about how Richard puts a production together," he says. "There's an intellect behind it as well, because he knows this is going to be a very passionate subject for people, and that

they're going to come with their own memories of parents or grandparents. He was ready for that, having brought the right group of people together to go to that place together, and he created an environment where you can get as deep into it as you want and you know you'll be safe."

A chance cocktail with Saperstein at the Cannes Film Festival led Walden Media's Frank Smith, Benjamin Tappan and Cherilyn Hawrysh to the script for NUREMBERG, and soon after reading it they knew they too had to jump aboard as producers. "I'd worked with Richard at New Line more than 25 years ago," notes Smith. "We reconnected after all these years, and he shared the script with me. I read it on the plane back to the United States, and by the time I got off the plane, I said, 'This is really something special, and we should partner with Richard to finance and produce.'"

"There was simply no doubt when we read the script," confirms Hawrysh. "James is such a brilliant writer to inject accessibility into such serious subject matter. The combination of James, the script, and Russell Crowe was irresistible."

Crowe, in fact, had committed to playing Hermann Göring in the years even before Bluestone and Walden joined the project. "I always wanted a movie star to play Göring," notes Vanderbilt. "I knew he needed to be charming to the audience and to Kelley, because in the world of our movie, Göring is a movie star. He's the famous one, known the world over. George Freeman, who was Russell's agent at the time, now manager, had read the script and loved it and asked if he could send it to Russell. Russell read it and just said yes, we didn't even have a conversation."

It was 2019, and Crowe had just finished shooting THE LOUDEST VOICE, Tom McCarthy and Alex Metcalf's HBO series about Roger Ailes, when he read the script for NUREMBERG on his way home to Australia. "I responded to it straight away," he says simply.

"Russell stayed with it the entire time, and George would check in to see how we were getting on, always reassuring us Russell still wanted to do it," adds Vanderbilt. "The movie wouldn't exist if Russell hadn't said yes, full stop."

Smith remembers seeing Crowe in a television interview promoting a previous movie and, when asked what his next project would be, telling the interviewer that he planned to make NUREMBERG. "We didn't even have a deal finalized for him at the time," Smith marvels. "The fact that he announced it publicly at that stage really demonstrates his commitment to this project."

Of the protracted development of the project, notes Crowe, "It's the ride you often go on, where it sometimes takes a little while to get it all assembled. But all those ups and downs and bumps and left turns have led us to the project we have today. Part of the commitment you make to stay with a project is listening to the director and committing to that individual. It was very easy for me to stay in place and to stay committed, because Jamie never wavered."

A while into production, having long since committed to taking part, Crowe confessed to Vanderbilt the two rules of his that he broke to take part in NUREMBERG. "One was that he loved having his beard, so he always wanted to wear a beard in movies. And the second was that he didn't want to do any more courtroom dramas. He told me, 'I broke both of those rules to do this movie.'"

Though the film is not, strictly speaking, a courtroom drama, long stretches recreating the Nuremberg Trials do take place in the film's second half. Laughs Crowe: "When I was younger, I found myself playing a role in a courtroom drama and I realized just how difficult they are to shoot. Everybody's in the room at the same time, but for the most part it's a lawyer talking to a witness. On that occasion, I had to sit in the dock day after day while everybody else went through their process.

It really made me feel like I should never do another one, but when this script turned up, I said, 'OK, maybe this is the courtroom drama I've been waiting for.'"

Supporting Vanderbilt behind the camera on NUREMBERG is an all-star team of department heads. "It was really a script that resonated for everyone, and we ended up with the first people we went to in every case," says Saperstein. "You couldn't get two better people than cinematographer Dariusz Wolski and production designer Eve Stewart to do your movie. Every single shot is exquisitely lit and designed, as you'd expect from them."

Indeed, Saperstein enthuses about the artistry and attention to detail he found in the environments Stewart created for the film, which include the Nuremberg jail in which the Nazi prisoners were held, and of course the courtroom itself, recreated to scale from countless reference material. "Eve's sets were exquisite and exact," he says. "When you walked onto the set, you were walking into history."

For Wolski, NUREMBERG told a story that touched his life. "I grew up in Poland, so World War II was a very important event for my family," Wolski explains. "My mom was in the concentration camp in Brennan when she was 11 years old. This is stuff I have grown up with, and even though you often want to get away from this stuff, this was a script about how it wasn't just good guys versus bad guys. Rather it's about the effects of the war, and it's about justice. It's about preserving a certain form of democracy."

Wolksi came aboard the project early, as roles were still being cast. "It happened that Jamie and I could spend a bit of time together thinking about it," he says. "There was a mutual respect and curiosity between us immediately. It's a dialogue-heavy film, but Jamie always allows for the visual medium to speak. He is always looking for new ways of approaching things, so that we aren't just making a clichéd World War II movie."

Ensuring the production captured the history of Nuremberg with as much accuracy as possible was historical consultant Michael Berenbaum. A distinguished scholar, author, and filmmaker, Berenbaum is widely recognized for his expertise in Holocaust studies and contemporary Jewish history. As a former project director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the author of numerous works on memory and historical representation, Berenbaum has dedicated his career to deepening public understanding of the Holocaust and its aftermath.

"When Jamie came to me with this script, I was intrigued by the fact that he was taking this on," Berenbaum explains. Of the importance of his early involvement in the project, which began with providing notes on the script as Vanderbilt worked to refine it even before production began, Berenbaum says, "When I work with people in Hollywood, I tell them, 'Call me sooner rather than later, because it'll be faster and cheaper.' And in that sense, they did. Richard and Jamie were polite enough to listen, and occasionally stupid enough to really adhere to what I had to say."

From that point forth, Berenbaum consulted with all departments, and offered insight to the cast and crew on location. The narrative thrust of NUREMBERG was particularly interesting to Berenbaum, who notes that it was predominantly Jack El-Hai's book that shone a spotlight on Kelley's contributions to the Nuremberg Trials, which had gone largely unrecognized before its publication. "Kelley was not well-known," he says.

"But focusing on his story allows us to ask: what is the psychology of the perpetrator? Similar to ZONE OF INTEREST, this is a study of that psychology in a particular way. It isn't just about the deed, but about who this man – Göring – is, and what led him to do all the things he did; to participate and orchestrate them."

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"They are symbols of fierce nationalisms and militarism, of intrigue and war-making which have embroiled Europe generation after generation, crushing its manhood, destroying its homes, and impoverishing its life. They have so identified themselves with the philosophies they conceived and with the forces they directed that any tenderness to them is a victory and an encouragement to all the evils which are attached to their names. Civilization can afford no compromise with the social forces which would gain renewed strength if we deal ambiguously or indecisively with the men in whom those forces now precariously survive."

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EVIL

At the center of NUREMBERG's narrative lies the riveting dynamic between Lt. Col. Douglas Kelley and Hermann Göring. Their relationship forms the emotional and psychological core of the film, as Kelley seeks to understand the mind of his infamous patient, the charismatic and cunning Göring. Through a series of probing interviews and tense exchanges, the film explores the blurred boundaries between fascination and revulsion, empathy and condemnation. The evolving interplay between Kelley and Göring not only illuminates the complexities of evil but also challenges both men – and the audience – to confront uncomfortable truths about power, responsibility, and the human psyche.

For Russell Crowe, tapping into the humanity and inhumanity of a character like Herman Göring was an irresistible draw, even if he knew it would be an enormous challenge. "For the most part, the things that attract me are the things that terrify me," he says. "I responded to the script straight away, but in a funny way I was also emotionally exhausted by it. How would you even attempt to play that guy? When that kind of question comes up, that's usually what I'm attracted to."

Crowe made his debut in front of a camera at just six years old. "If there's one thing I've learned as I've gone on, it's that you cannot beat a magnificent character," he says. "No matter where that magnificence comes from, whether it's a magnificence of convolution, a magnificence of intent, or a magnificence of beauty. Wherever that magnificence comes from, you cannot beat that."

Tappan notes that Crowe's embrace of playing such a dark character speaks to his command of his craft. "It's a bold move for an actor," he says. "To get into the head of this monster, and to try to find a sliver of empathy for him. If there's one false move you can be laughed at, but if you do it correctly, as he did, it's the performance of a lifetime."

For Crowe, it was not just the challenge of playing Göring, but about how little room there would be to hide in the cramped jail cell in which much of Göring's interaction with Kelley takes place. "This is an interior drama for the most part," the actor says. "There's not a lot of explosions or guns going off. It involves so many different aspects of psychology and psychoanalysis that it sets itself apart from what we traditionally think of as a 'war movie'."

Crowe dove headfirst into the research, spending the years the project was being developed getting to know increasingly more about Göring, Kelley, and the trials. "He was all-in on it," notes

Vanderbilt. “And when we finally got round to doing it, he focused himself on doing the work. There was no vanity about it, no movie star stuff. He was fully committed.”

Research is an aspect of the job Crowe relishes. “Five years ago, I really didn’t know anything much about this period of history,” he says. “That all changes when it becomes your focus. I didn’t know, for instance, that Göring was a flying ace in World War I. I didn’t know about his family situation, which was fascinating. And I didn’t know his personal history in terms of what his schooling had been and what his hobbies were.”

What Crowe found surprised him and clarified his interest in getting under the skin of Herman Göring. Göring had hailed from a family firmly rooted in the German upper middle class. The young Göring’s upbringing was shaped by periods spent in grand surroundings, including time under the care of family friends at the castle of Haimhausen near Munich, where he developed a taste for luxury, authority, and spectacle. His schooling was marked by both academic rigor and a rebellious streak, and he gravitated toward military life early. This environment of discipline, privilege, and exposure to both ambition and indulgence laid the groundwork for the complex, charismatic persona he would later wield on Germany’s national stage.

“Göring was the real deal,” Crowe explains. “He was an absolute failure at school until somebody put him in front of the right subject, and then it was like he was magna cum laude. He changed from a normal school to a military school, going from the bottom of the class to the very top. Then, he’s faced with a war situation, and he realizes, ‘If I stay on the ground, it’s a bad life. I want to be up there.’ So, he manufactured his way to becoming a pilot, and when they needed pilots, he was there. He had the experience, he knew what to do, and he racked up 22 kills. As a fighter pilot, if you get seven kills, you’re an ace; that’s how difficult it is to shoot somebody out of the sky with a fixed position gun.”

Emerging from the World War I as a flying ace, Göring’s reputation soared further when he took command of the famed “Red Baron” Manfred von Richthofen’s squadron after Richthofen’s death. His daring in the skies and his status as a war hero earned him widespread recognition. “So, after the First World War, you go and buy a pack of cigarettes in Germany, and there’s a little card inside the box with his picture on it. Göring was a leader, and people were very attracted to him. It was what had drawn Hitler to him, because he was a national hero.”

Crowe knew he wouldn’t get to embellish much of this detail on screen, but it proved fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of his interpretation of Göring. “You want to capture some form of essence of the person as opposed to doing an impression,” he explains. “With this particular character, you’re trying to bring in echoes of these other parts of who he was while only dealing with a small period in his life.”

“Göring had an insatiable appetite for everything,” notes Berenbaum. “The mansion he lived in, the artwork he collected… and he had an insatiable appetite for the number of pills he was taking every day. Part of what happened at Nuremberg is that they got him off the pills, and the more they weaned him off, the more rational he became, and therefore the more dangerous he became. He was clearly the leader of this pack of Germans who were on trial.”

Göring’s path into the Nazi inner circle in the first instance was shaped less by ideological fervor than by ambition, personal charisma, and a hunger for power. Unlike some of his peers, Göring did not initially embody the more virulent strains of Nazism, and at times his personal beliefs diverged from the party’s most radical elements. Nevertheless, he proved eager to seize upon those aspects of party doctrine that advanced his own status and influence.

Over time, the tension between Göring's self-image and the movement's brutality was eroded by the demands of power, and he became an architect and executor of horrific policies, instrumental in perpetrating the regime's atrocities, even as his own priorities and sense of control slipped away.

In the end, whatever distinctions he may have drawn in his own mind, Göring's complicity in the machinery of Nazi terror was unmistakable, and the consequences of his actions were inescapably bound to the horrors committed in the party's name.

Crowe was forced to grapple with those aspects of Göring's personality that were, for want of a better word, magnetic, particularly as the weight of the crimes of the Nazi regime never left the picture. Says Crowe, of Göring's irredeemable slide: "At around 1942, the narrative got away from him, and he couldn't control it anymore. The things he felt were the least important had overtaken his priorities."

There came a point at which Göring, had simply gone too far – and too willingly – to find any kind of route back. "There's a line in the film where Göring says even his antisemitism had a practical purpose," says Crowe. "The distance you've got to take from your own humanity to say something like that is staggering, and it's where Göring, as I play him, gets uncovered. It's not in overt aggressions, but in a kind of insensitivity to the horror of what he's saying. He can no longer see the whole picture because he's too focused on a particular frame. I think, at a certain point, he managed to convince himself that he might get away with it all if his performance in court was strong enough."

"You can love your wife and child and still murder another man's wife and child, and you could do so with a certain measure of equanimity," explains Berenbaum. "The whole process of the Holocaust became about depersonalizing the killings. It became a factory assembly line, which depersonalized the entire killing process. It was a factory of death."

However, Crowe thinks Göring truly believed the defense he put up at Nuremberg, and the justifications he made to Douglas Kelley, and he believed that he would succeed on the stand. "It was the size of his ego that made him say, 'I can still turn this around,'" Crowe says. "'I can turn it around on behalf of all the other Germans who went into this because we wanted our country to survive and to thrive.' He thought he could use people and control the narrative, but he just couldn't."

Crowe certainly felt the toll of playing a character like Göring over a long film shoot. "I was living in a place where I wasn't very happy with myself," he confesses. "You can be as objective as you want, but if you're going to get involved in doing these things properly then you must give a certain amount of energy to them. The difficulty is there are aspects of Göring that are quite charming. The way his mind works, and how he can present an argument, can break things down for you, and he can say such evil things in a very casual way."

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"Twice in my lifetime, the United States has sent its young manhood across the Atlantic, drained its resources, and burdened itself with debt to help defeat Germany. But the real hope and faith that has sustained the American people in these great efforts was that victory for ourselves and our Allies would lay the basis for an ordered international relationship in Europe and would end the centuries of strife on this embattled continent…

The United States cannot, generation after generation, throw its youth or its resources onto the battlefields of Europe to redress the lack of balance between Germany's strength and that of her enemies, and to keep the battles from our shores. The American dream of a peace-and-plenty economy, as well as the hopes of other nations, can never be fulfilled if those nations are involved in a war every generation so vast and devastating as to crush the generation that fights and burden the generation that follows."

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AN EAGER PSYCHIATRIST

To play alongside Crowe's Göring as Douglas Kelley, Vanderbilt knew he needed to find an actor who could not only go toe-to-toe with Crowe in their scenes together, but who could capture the nuance of personality that Kelley represents; a man who found himself charmed by the charisma of Hermann Göring, but who ultimately sounded the most cogent alarm about how dangerous these charms could be.

Kelley, says Vanderbilt, was a contradiction himself. "He was a scientist, and he was also an amateur magician who used to volunteer to sit in the backseat of cockpits to help the army test the effects of G-forces on the human body. We're putting a psychiatrist on screen who is like nothing you've ever seen. He's a daredevil, he's a bit rash."

Indeed, beyond his accomplishments as a psychiatrist, Douglas Kelley harbored a lifelong fascination with magic, delighting in the art of illusion and often performing sleight-of-hand tricks for friends and colleagues. This passion for magic was more than a mere hobby; it reflected his curiosity about the mind's capacity for wonder and deception. Kelley saw parallels between the magician's craft – misdirection, reading an audience, psychological manipulation – and his own work in psychiatry, where understanding human behavior and uncovering hidden truths were essential. His skills even found their way into his professional life, whether entertaining fellow doctors at conferences or employing psychological insights drawn from magic to better understand those he was tasked with analyzing.

In fact, it was Kelley's interest in magic that, in a roundabout way, tipped Jack El-Hai off to his untold story in the first place. El-Hai had been working on a previous book, THE LOBOTOMIST, about Walter Freeman, an American psychiatrist who had developed and advocated lobotomy as a treatment for psychiatric disorders, when in the doctor's autobiography, Freeman mentioned meeting Douglas Kelley at a conference of the American Psychiatric Association. "He was actually there to give a magic show," laughs El-Hai. "Dr. Freeman had kept up with Kelley, knew he had taken his own life in 1958, and knew a rough idea of Kelley's life story, and it interested me."

Adds Vanderbilt: "I like the idea of taking characters you'd think would be one way and then showing another side of them, which is also exactly what Kelley found in Göring."

There are similarities and contradictions between these two men that bring their dynamic to life, but for Vanderbilt, there was also a certain license in the way Kelley's story has faded into history. "Göring is so well known that everybody will have an idea about him," the director says. "But Kelley isn't, except in the pages of Jack's book. We weren't trying to match someone physically."

The search to find the right contender was a long one, and in the end, perhaps in keeping with the nature of Kelley's character, it was a search that landed at a destination the filmmakers had not considered. "Rami Malek read the script on his own, we hadn't sent it to him," explains Vanderbilt. Eager to seek out the best material wherever it may be, Malek had indicated to his agents that he was keen to review anything they found interesting, whether there was an offer out for him or not.

Continues Vanderbilt: "Movie stars of his caliber don't usually read scripts without offers, especially not movie stars with Oscars. But we got a call from him expressing his interest, and we started a series of meetings. It became clear that he was all-in from day one."

Malek hadn't just stopped at the script, but had charged ahead through Jack El-Hai's source material, and summoned up a copy of 22 CELLS AT NUREMBERG, Douglas Kelley's book about his experiences there, which was not easy to track down having been out of print for decades. "I love history, and if you give me something to read, I'll always gravitate to nonfiction over fiction," says Malek. "Reading this script, I felt exactly as I hope audiences will when they come out of the movie, which is a sense of, 'How did I not know this?' It was a very unique perspective into one of the most devastatingly dangerous moments in history. It was shocking, and I found it so profoundly well-written and balanced. I thought, How can I be a part of this?"

The film's central thread – that the line between hero and villain is rarely as distinct as we might wish – finds its most fascinating expression in Kelley. Though celebrated as a brilliant psychiatrist, whose insights into the Nazi defendants have echoed through decades of psychological inquiry into the nature of evil, Kelley himself wrestled with restless ambition and fractious interactions with his colleagues. His intellect was dazzling, his drive unstoppable, yet beneath the surface simmered a man as complex and combustible as those he was charged with understanding.

"There's a line in the script where Kelley says of his father, 'He's a man of no accomplishment,'" notes Vanderbilt. "It's a real quote from Doug, and I remember discussing it with Rami. It's such a specific thing to say about your father. It's cruel, but it also speaks to disappointment and a desire to be better. To leave your mark on the world."

As a member of a storied family, Vanderbilt empathized with this side of Kelley's personality. As a young man, he too had been keen to free himself from the shackles of expectation that came with being a Vanderbilt. "I really understood that desire to make his own mark. Suddenly, he's confronted by Göring, who is not a great man, but who is famous and has risen to prominence and power. They're not opposites exactly, but the two polarities they represent I found really fascinating."

"There was definitely an ambitious side to Kelley," echoes Malek. "He was geared towards proving his worth. He was confident in his strengths and capabilities, and he wanted to be appreciated for them. He also had an innate curiosity with the mind that helped him see things with a unique perspective. He was an obsessive to match Göring's narcissist."

So, Kelley immediately recognizes the opportunity that has been presented to him in assigning him to analyze the Nazi prisoners; perhaps even before he recognizes the task itself. "He finds himself in a situation that he knows is historic," says Malek. "He knows he needs to rise to the occasion, but he's also infatuated with the charisma and the charm of Hermann Göring. He can't help himself try to befriend him."

Vanderbilt can appreciate the conundrum for Kelley, and he leaned into allowing the character of Göring to work his charms on Kelley and the audience. "It's a psychiatrist's job to try to understand the person sitting opposite them and not arrive with preconceived notions," he says. "One of the

things I was really interested in was playing a bit of a magic trick on the audience. You can't help but walk into the movie with preconceived notions about Göring – as Kelley does as well – but as the walls come down you start to see the human being inside. Of course, then the magic trick gets pulled when the Holocaust footage is shown in the courtroom, and you're made to remember you're dealing with a high-ranking Nazi war criminal."

The challenge of playing the nuances in these moments fell on Crowe and Malek equally, a challenge wholly embraced by each of the actors as they found a partnership on screen. "We've been through a gigantic cycle with one another," says Crowe of his time with Malek. "At certain points we have to connect in an extremely intimate way, and at others we have to separate at such a fundamental level that it's almost impossible to be in the same space. You can't do that with somebody who doesn't bring a lot with them like Rami does."

"Russell was a formidable adversary," Malek says. "It'll be tricky for audiences to grapple with how they feel about Göring because of how charismatic Russell is. Shooting in the cell with him, there was a proximity where it felt like there was no escape. We had to face each other and deliver with this sense of claustrophobia hanging over us."

With production designer Eve Stewart, Vanderbilt made the decision to build the jail cells as a contiguous set. Given the tight confines, it would be standard procedure to make the cells' walls moveable to accommodate the camera, but the design omitted this flexibility intentionally. "It was smart filmmaking, because he takes you from the movie theater where you're watching this movie on a big screen and it makes you feel claustrophobic," says Smith. "You feel tight and uncomfortable, and it adds to the intensity."

With the encouragement of Vanderbilt, Crowe and Malek reveled in experimenting within the bounds of the script. "Sometimes I'd do takes slyly, sometimes more aggressively," explains Malek. "The late Philip Seymour Hoffman had given me some advice about a scene with Joaquin Phoenix on THE MASTER, which was, 'Make him as uncomfortable as you possibly can.' I thought about that in those moments with Russell, because it was about trying to make Göring feel the horror of what he had done."

Witnessing the two Oscar-winning actors play psychological games with one another in almost every interaction between them was Leo Woodall who, as Sgt. Howie Triest, serves as a translator between the German-speaking Göring and the English-speaking Kelley. "It was like watching two titans go toe-to-toe," Woodall enthuses. "It has been an incredible learning experience for me, and a real privilege."

Woodall remembers a scene in which Kelley administers a Rorschach inkblot test to Göring. "I don't really say anything, because it becomes clear that Göring actually speaks English," he notes. "The scene ended, but the two of them didn't stop. They just kept going and going, and they came up with so many magic moments that I hope make the final cut. But there was a moment Rami turned to me, as Kelley, and said, 'Howie, what do you think?' I nearly responded in my English accent… I was so immersed that I'd come completely out of character."

"Rami manages to be – and to stay – so available for what's happening around him," says Saperstein of Malek's approach to his craft. "He's like a finely tuned instrument; so sensitive and yet also very astute and intellectually present. To watch him waver in front of Göring, then somehow find his footing and his moral courage, and deliver Kelley's outrage in the scene after the footage of the Holocaust is shown in court… to me, that's one of the best scenes in the movie for both of them, because it's so emotional, and they both rose to the occasion."

In the end, victory is elusive for both men and must be found in small moments for each of them. “It’s almost like Göring curses Kelley,” says Crowe. “At a certain point, Kelley holds a mirror up to him and Göring doesn’t like what he sees. But instead of taking it aboard as something he’s done, he pushes it back towards Kelley to result in the unhappy life he led after the trials. For Douglas Kelley, the psychiatrist who spent countless hours with those Nazis, to end up killing himself with the same poison Göring had used… it beggars’ belief.”

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“Experience has shown that wars are no longer local. All modern wars become world wars eventually. And none of the big nations at least can stay out. If we cannot stay out of wars, our only hope is to prevent wars. I am too well aware of the weaknesses of juridical action alone to contend that in itself your decision under this charter can prevent future wars… But the ultimate step in avoiding periodic wars, which are inevitable in a system of international lawlessness, is to make statesmen responsible to law. And let me make clear that, while this law is first applied against German aggressors, the law includes, and if it is to serve a useful purpose it must condemn, aggression by any other nation, including those which now sit here in judgment. We are able to do away with domestic tyranny and violence and aggression by those in power against the rights of their own people only when we make all men answerable to the law.”

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THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE

The third key arm of James Vanderbilt’s script for NUREMBERG is a character who belies the director’s central premise to challenge traditional notions of heroes and villains. Robert H. Jackson, the Supreme Court associate justice who not only became the lead prosecutor at Nuremberg but was also the key architect in mounting the unprecedented series of trials in the first place, is a man Vanderbilt considers an unequivocal hero. So, who better to approach in order to stick with the theme, Vanderbilt laughs, than an actor commonly cast as villains?

“It was our casting director John Papsidera who suggested Michael, and I loved the idea,” says Vanderbilt. “Russell is so often cast as a hero, and here he is playing Hermann Göring. Whereas Michael’s the one always cast as bad guys, and finally in this movie he gets to be a true American hero; the man who stood up to say, ‘No, we should not execute these men without first putting them on trial.’”

With his typical sangfroid, Shannon says he was grateful for the thought. “They say the lion’s share of directing is casting, but I was flattered when they thought of me for the part, because I am commonly associated with villains, which I find a little disconcerting,” says the actor. “I feel like I’ve played all different types of folks, but I think a lot of people assume that if I’m going to be in a movie, I’ll be playing the baddie. I felt fortunate to have Jamie say, ‘No, I want you to play a true hero.’”

Robert H. Jackson insisted that even those responsible for the worst crimes of World War II deserved a fair, legal process rather than summary execution, laying what would become the foundation for modern international law. As lead prosecutor, Jackson built the case against Nazi leaders and ensured the proceedings were just, setting a lasting standard for accountability and the pursuit of justice through the rule of law.

“Robert Jackson basically invented the international criminal court,” notes Vanderbilt. “And he was building that airplane as he was flying it during the Nuremberg Trials. He left the Supreme Court to be the chief prosecutor for the United States. He also lost the opportunity to become Chief Justice. It’s really an incredible story.”

It is important to reflect on how impossible Jackson’s task must have seemed at its outset, especially as each of the Allied forces had a different idea about how to proceed. “Churchill wanted to shoot them, and Stalin wanted a Stalinist trial – where the outcome is already decided. The new American president, Harry S Truman, wanted to make it about justice,” Berenbaum points out. “Over the years, I’ve come to appreciate that Nuremberg was the attempt to build the scaffolding of justice that was desperately needed. They needed to rebuild – or at least find a measure of rebuilding – the fragments of society, and Nuremberg was that attempt.”

For Shannon, as with his co-stars, taking the role meant diving into the history, an aspect he, too, relished. “I’m embarrassed to say I didn’t really know much about the history of the event, and I didn’t know about Robert Jackson,” Shannon confesses. “Reading the script, I was moved by the man and his efforts to bring this trial into existence, at some cost to himself personally. I jumped down the rabbit hole, which is a lot easier than it used to be, because all you have to do is go on the internet. There was a whole website devoted to him and his work.”

Grappling with the complex legal arguments that formed the basis of Jackson’s prosecution was the biggest challenge he faced. “I don’t have a legal mind at all,” Shannon notes. “I find it pretty vexing, honestly; all the nooks and crannies of it. So, I don’t know if I would have it in me to do what he did. But I could totally identify with his yearning and desire that these men not be martyred for a cause that was abhorrent.”

“Michael brings a gravitas to Jackson that I thought was important,” says Vanderbilt. “You do believe this man is a Supreme Court justice who walks those corridors of power, and who understands how to pull those levers.”

For Crowe and Malek, working with Shannon meant reuniting with their co-star on MAN OF STEEL and AMSTERDAM respectively. “I knew Michael to be an actor of great integrity from our time on MAN OF STEEL,” says Crowe. “When they said they wanted him to play Jackson, I was excited because I knew that Michael would not let the truth pass him by.”

“I’ve always admired Michael,” says Malek. “When we started working on this, I had just seen him on stage in WAITING FOR GODOT. He truly is of a different caliber. He’s an absolute perfectionist and an absolute professional, and he elevates you.”

Adds Crowe: “Other people have played Robert Jackson as a 1950s matinee idol, and that is such disrespect to history and the truth. Michael goes beyond that. He’s more intelligent than that, and he’s driven by heart and looking to find the reality.”

Though Crowe had been eager not to find himself lost in the morass of complex coverage shooting court room scenes usually entails, it was James Vanderbilt who decided to approach his actors with

an alternative idea for how to stage the courtroom clash between Göring, Jackson, and Jackson's British counterpart Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, played by Richard E. Grant.

Rather than shoot portions of their exchanges, turning the camera around to capture each key actor's reaction – which in these scenes also included other members of the Nuremberg ensemble including Rami Malek, Leo Woodall, John Slattery, and the actors playing the Nazi high command – they would run four cameras simultaneously, and allow the actors to perform an unbroken 17-page scene. The takes would last up to 25 minutes on their own.

"Of course, they leapt at the chance to do it this way, and I think they assumed that's how we'd do it from the start," says Vanderbilt.

"That's how I would have wanted to do it," says Shannon. "I'm a theatre actor, so I'm used to going out and delivering even longer stretches than that. Russell wanted to do it that way too, and in the end, I think, we would up saving the production a whole day because of it."

"17 pages of two men going at each other in a courtroom, shot as a single take," marvels Crowe. "I've never experienced doing something like that on a feature film before, and it does become theatre. The preparation you put in to deliver it really is crazy."

Adds Shannon: "The challenge, of course, is the memorization, particularly with this very legal dialogue, but I was able to cram it all in there and I think the scene benefited from it."

From the producer's chair, Richard Saperstein says witnessing these takes was a special moment. "They were just so locked in," he notes. "They all got the importance of it. They all recognized deeply the significance of what they were doing, and in lifting themselves up, lifted each other too."

"It became one of the most incredible days I've ever had on a movie set," says Vanderbilt. "When we called cut, 300 Hungarian extras playing the other people in the courtroom – for whom English isn't their first language – all burst into applause."

Shannon credits his co-stars with offering him the right dynamic to draw out his best work. "I was incredibly inspired and motivated by Russell, who I thought was doing some of the finest work of his career. Having Russell across from me, and Richard E. Grant by my side, who is just the loveliest human being you could hope to meet, was very special. There was a feeling in the room that something significant was taking place. That it wasn't just another day on a film set. I think we all elevated each other with our commitment to the piece. We nudged each other to push as hard as we could to make it come to life."

"I've never done anything like that before of since – it felt electrifying," adds Grant, who enjoyed his uninterrupted vantage point on the scene. "Russell Crowe has a natural authority and charm, and his command as Göring was irrefutable. Michael Shannon has the square-jawed implacability of a Mount Rushmore sculpture. Their on-screen confirmation in the court room riveted everyone."

For Vanderbilt, part of the potency of the courtroom scenes came from how closely they hew to the official transcripts of the trial, which are readily available to review online. Before the scene was shot, he went through those transcripts with his actors, seeking out key moments to include. "The transcripts were a goldmine of material, and I wanted to stick as close to them as we could," the director explains. "Obviously, there's a compression, because Göring and Jackson had spent two and a half days with Göring on the stand, but I felt strongly that if there was something we didn't need to change, we shouldn't change it."

As depicted in the film, it is true that it was British prosecutor, David Maxwell-Fyfe, who delivered the knockout blow in the cross examination of Göring. “The core of it is the Göring is on the stand fighting to preserve his vision, and they’re trying to break him,” notes Berenbaum. “Much to the contrary of the mythology, it was not Jackson, whose opening statement has gone down as one of the historical epics of human justice. It was the British prosecutor, who got Göring on precisely this type of leaked information.”

Jackson and Maxwell-Fyfe’s searing cross examination of Göring builds to a moment in the trials in which the courtroom, and, indeed, the whole world, is shown footage from the inside of the Nazi concentration camps.

The footage shocked the courtroom with its stark, unfiltered portrayal of human suffering. The film, compiled by Allied forces from liberated camps, included scenes of mass graves, emaciated survivors, and the machinery of extermination. Its impact on the court was profound – judges, prosecutors, and even the accused were visibly disturbed, and the footage served to make the crimes undeniable and concrete.

Beyond the courtroom, the Allies distributed this footage globally through cinema newsreels, ensuring mass public exposure. Audiences around the world reacted with horror and disbelief, many witnessing for the first time the full scale of the atrocities. The emotional and moral weight of the images played a key role in shaping global understanding of the Holocaust, and further reinforced support for justice through international law.

Vanderbilt knew that the significance of showing the footage could not be glossed over. “The whole movie is built for the moment when you get to the footage from the concentration camps,” he says. “It was always important to me that the movie be entertaining, and that the engine of the story should engage you enough to enjoy the ride. But then that footage serves as a bit of a sucker punch, as it should. We’ve become so desensitized to horrific footage, and I wanted it to have the proper impact on the audience watching the film; the same impact it has on the people watching it from inside the courtroom.”

Concludes Berenbaum: “The Nuremberg Trials were held as a trial by documents. When the footage from the camps plays in the movie, it essentially becomes the film within the film. It shows the power of film as evidence, and it’s a turning point for Douglas, because while he understood the nature of the crimes – he was even studying the criminal – it didn’t become real to him, or indeed to the world, until he saw that film.”

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“No charity can disguise the fact that the forces which these defendants represent, the forces that would advantage and delight in their acquittal, are the darkest and most sinister forces in society – dictatorship and oppression, malevolence and passion, militarism and lawlessness. By their fruits we best know them. Their acts have bathed the world in blood and set civilization back a century. They have subjected their European neighbors to every outrage and torture, every spoliation and deprivation that insolence, cruelty, and greed could inflict. They have brought the German people to the lowest pitch of wretchedness, from which they can entertain no hope of early deliverance. They have stirred hatreds and

incited domestic violence on every continent. These are the things that stand in the dock shoulder to shoulder with these prisoners."

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EXPANDING THE ENSEMBLE

Though NUREMBERG focuses on Kelley, Göring and Jackson as a central trio, it was always Vanderbilt's intent to introduce a wider cast of key players in smaller, but no less significant roles. And what he found as he set out to cast these roles, with his script already setting tongues wagging throughout the industry, was an acting pool itching to take part in the project. With the collaboration of veteran casting director John Papsidera (OPPENHEIMER, JURASSIC WORLD, 2025's SUPERMAN), Vanderbilt scoured the globe for the right people to play these roles.

"Casting is like cooking; it's about infusing different flavors," says Vanderbilt. "Rami's vibe is different to Russell's vibe, is different to Michael's vibe, and so on. I wanted the ensemble to be a full meal of different types of actors, with different ways into their characters."

Among the unsung figures at the Nuremberg Trials, Sgt. Howie Triest played a vital role behind the scenes. As an interpreter and translator, Triest was instrumental in bridging the language gap between the prosecution, the defendants, and the court, ensuring that testimony, evidence, and cross-examinations were faithfully conveyed. His presence allowed the proceedings to flow smoothly, and his keen attention to nuance helped preserve the subtlety and intent behind each statement. While he rarely stood in the spotlight, Triest's dedication embodied the quiet heroism required to hold such a historic event together, providing an indispensable human link that helped transform the chaos of war into the order of justice.

What made Triest's contribution all the more poignant was his own background as a German-born Jew who had fled Nazi persecution with his family before the war. He and his family resettled in the United States, where nationals of the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) were initially considered "enemy aliens" and faced severe restrictions on their freedom. Triest joined the U.S. Army, which had quickly discovered that Jews born in Germany harbored a strong hatred of the Nazi regime and possessed linguistic and cultural skills essential to winning the war and beginning the denazification process. Returning to Germany in an American uniform with the victorious army, Triest bore witness not only as a linguist and facilitator of justice, but as someone whose life had been irrevocably shaped by the very regime on trial.

In Vanderbilt's screenplay for NUREMBERG, Triest becomes the audience's cypher as he translates for Kelley and Göring – though it becomes swiftly evident to both men that Göring is keeping the fact he speaks fluent English from his captors. Still, we don't learn about Triest's personal history until he shares it with Kelley in a charged scene at a train station towards the end of the film's run time, a pivotal moment not just for Howie, but for the movie itself.

"I said very early on, 'I'm not casting anybody in this part until I've seen them do that scene,'" recalls Vanderbilt. "It had to be somebody for whom the movie could stop dead for seven minutes for him to monologue, and you're not going to be unhappy about that."

At the time, British actor Leo Woodall had just broken through in the second season of Mike White's THE WHITE LOTUS, but he was not the household name he has subsequently become through work

in productions like ONE DAY and BRIDGET JONES: MAD ABOUT THE BOY. “Leo chased this,” Vanderbilt continues. “He put himself on tape, and we did a callback where he performed this scene.”

It was all Vanderbilt needed to see to know he had to cast Woodall in the role. “It was undeniable. We weren’t necessarily looking for a name in that role, just a great actor you wouldn’t see coming with this pivotal moment for the character. He also had to be the third man sitting in a cell with two Academy Award winners, so he needed to be able to hold his own, and Leo does. So, by the time we got to the train station scene I wasn’t nervous at all. I knew he would crush it, and he did, first take.”

Woodall knew as soon as he read the script for NUREMBERG that he wanted to be a part of it. “It was something very special,” he says. “You always want to feel like the work you’re doing matters, and with this, it really does.”

Having secured the part, Woodall eagerly immersed himself in language lessons. “I didn’t speak a lick of German,” the actor laughs. “The first scene of the whole shoot was going be between me, Rami Malek, and Russell Crowe, and I’m translating for both of them. It was a case of being thrown in at the deep end.”

He continues: “I had a great language coach, but it definitely increased the pressure. I was lucky enough to find a bit of an ear for it, because it’s a completely different language to English, with plenty of sounds we simply don’t make in English.”

The work was worth it for Woodall as he came to learn more about Howie Triest and his background. The actor turned to documentaries and interviews Triest had given to better understand who he was, his family history, and his time at Nuremberg. “I wanted to tell his story as best I could,” Woodall says. “You gather all the information you can find, and sometimes it doesn’t come out, but it’s all in there somewhere. The scene where Howie reveals himself, Jamie did such a wonderful job of it. He doesn’t color it with anything that isn’t factual, and it’s not indulgent in any way. His heartbreaking story is powerful enough on its own.”

For Saperstein, Woodall’s commitment to his task is witnessed as much in what leads to that moment at the train station. “You may not quite notice it until you get to that scene, but he’s always completely committed to the character,” Saperstein notes, even when Howie’s dialogue appears functional rather than emotional. “Howie is, in a way, our representative in those scenes between Göring and Kelley. He’s the audience. And I think Leo’s performance will blow people away.”

“He’s beautiful in the film,” adds Crowe. “So unassuming, and then when it’s his moment, he’s 100% there for it.”

Summarizes Malek: “It’s very refined and restrained, what Leo does. There’s a subtlety and nuance to his craft that the camera really appreciates – and I got to experience it from a front row seat.”

Cast as Robert Jackson’s British counterpart, Nuremberg prosector Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, is a national treasure of British film, Richard E. Grant. Key to Jackson’s establishment of the first international criminal court was the participation of all of the Allied countries, and Vanderbilt simply wasn’t interested in making NUREMBERG a jingoistic celebration of American might alone. “We didn’t have the luxury of time that we would have had this been a miniseries rather than a feature film,” notes Vanderbilt. “But it was important to show the international aspect of the trial, and so to play Maxwell-Fyfe, I wanted an actor that brings a lot of wonderful baggage to the screen. We wanted him to make a grand entrance in the film, because he deserves that. If you want a

wonderfully funny, vivacious actor with a witty retort, Richard E. Grant is your man, and he came exactly as advertised."

Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe played a pivotal role in the Nuremberg Trials as the British chief prosecutor, representing the United Kingdom. His participation was crucial in establishing the international character of the tribunal, demonstrating unity among the Allied powers and lending credibility to the court's authority. Renowned for his calm, logical, and persuasive prosecution style, Maxwell-Fyfe's cross-examinations and arguments helped lay the groundwork for the conviction of key Nazi leaders.

For his part, Grant, who describes himself as a history buff, leapt at the chance to be involved. "The Nuremberg Trials were such a potent historical moment – justice being fought for and served on the most heinous military regime of the last century," Grant says. "It felt a real privilege to be taking part in this re-creation with such a dedicated production team and director – it all felt personal."

Malek enjoyed the experience of watching Grant from across the courtroom, though their two characters don't have much interaction in the film. He confirms Grant's commitment to the part: "Everybody wanted to be a part of the contagious courage that Jamie had delivered in the script and in his direction, and Richard truly rose to that occasion."

Grant found Maxwell-Fyfe faithfully drawn in the pages of Vanderbilt's script, and as part of his research for the role, he watched the entire trial on YouTube to learn more about the man. "His calm, controlled, logical and cogent prosecution style was riveting and winning," Grant says of what he found. "There was a risk in getting the Nazis convicted in court of law. The fact that the Reich documented everything so meticulously proved their undoing, as they had kept the evidence of everyone they had murdered in the gas chambers."

U.S. Army Col. Burton Andrus served as the commandant of Nuremberg prison during the Nuremberg Trials, overseeing the detention and security of the Nazi leaders awaiting prosecution. Tasked with ensuring order and discipline among a group of high-profile and often volatile prisoners, Andrus maintained strict routines and protocols to prevent escape, suicide, or collusion. Andrus's diligence was crucial in maintaining the integrity of the tribunal process.

"Andrus had the incredibly challenging task of keeping these men alive until they could be put to death," notes Vanderbilt. "He knew that if he lost somebody – and ultimately, he did lose one of the prisoners along the way – he'd hear about it. In a way, it's sort of the worst job in the world, because you can only fail."

In NUREMBERG, Andrus serves as a foil for Kelley, but Vanderbilt knew it was a challenging role for an actor. "John Slattery is someone I've admired for years and years, and he has this wonderful, warm quality and humor about him."

This was key for Vanderbilt, who needed someone who could soften Andrus's harder edges. "On the page, the character is a stick in the mud, bombarding Kelley with rules. I wanted John's vibe and flavor infused into it, because otherwise the character could be seen as one-dimensional. He doesn't get a lot of screen time, he's not a hugely well-known historical figure, and here he is imposing a heap of rules on our lead."

Slattery tracked down Col. Andrus's book about the trials – entitled I WAS THE NUREMBERG JAILER – and the actor was struck by the formality of Andrus's clinical descriptions of events, and how that contrasted with how he presented himself. "If you see pictures of him, he's very much a peacock, with the super shiny helmet he wore all the time, and a riding crop. There's a limit to how much of

that we can get away with, but the obligation is to create as much of a fully fleshed-out human being in the time the story allows, without trying to do too much."

In the end, he agrees, the Andrus of James Vanderbilt's NUREMBERG is primarily a thorn in Kelley's side. "They've been fighting this war for six years, and I think he feels he just wants to get this done. He's a thorn in Kelley's side and Kelley is a thorn in his side. He's thinking, I want to have this trial, I want these men to get what they deserve, and I want to go home without a stain on my record."

Says Malek: "Slattery finds a way to elevate that character to the point that he's lifted off the page, and you feel the frustration, and the exasperated nature of his post. He's so disgruntled, but John makes him charming."

Smith cites MAD MEN as proof that Slattery is a master of sarcasm, a key trait in his portrayal of Andrus. "He can deliver a sarcastic line in a way in which there's humor and truth throughout," the producer says. "In a film with subject matter this intense, people need a laugh here or there to offer a moment of levity, and I think his ability to deliver those lines is license for the audience to take that breath."

Though Douglas Kelley was the first mental health professional to analyze the Nazi prisoners, Col. Andrus eventually grew weary of Kelley's approach and summoned a psychologist, Dr. Gustave Gilbert, to join him at Nuremberg prison. Gilbert rejected Kelley's attempt to get close to his subjects, insisting that professional distance was necessary to objectively analyze them. To say the two men didn't get on would be to understate the case – Kelley described Gilbert as an "intelligent but sadistic egotist" and an "aggressive psychopath" in his manuscript of his time at Nuremberg.

Theirs was a "silly professional feud", though whether it was equally sided is up for debate. Gilbert offered to co-author a book on their time at Nuremberg with Kelley, believing joining forces would bolster the result. In the end, Kelley published his own, leaving Gilbert disappointed. Still, the psychologist resisted criticizing Kelley openly in his book, NUREMBERG DIARY, published in 1947.

"Douglas Kelley was, in one sense, almost disgraced, because Kelley was telling us something we didn't want to hear. We liked black and white, good and bad, heroes and villains."

Gilbert's book, which is still in print in contrast to Kelley's, became the de facto psychoanalysis of the Nazi high command. "Perhaps because he stayed at Nuremberg longer, or the book was more robust," muses Vanderbilt. "I was just incredibly amused by the idea of two psychiatrists having a fistfight."

Indeed, their professional rivalry, already simmering beneath the surface, famously reached its boiling point in a tense physical altercation that has since become the stuff of legend among Nuremberg scholars. Accounts differ as to who threw the first punch, but it's clear that their deep philosophical disagreements and mutual disdain erupted in a moment of raw frustration. The scuffle was quickly broken up, yet it underscored the intensity of their feud and the high stakes of their unique circumstances, as two passionate psychologists grappled not only with Nazi war criminals but also with each other's convictions.

Says Malek: "They're both highly intelligent people, and they're both interested in the psychology of power and authority, and in evil, of course. Gilbert is just doing his job, whereas I think Kelley wanted more. He was perhaps a little more self-serving, which made him combative with his colleagues."

For Vanderbilt, casting Colin Hanks as Gilbert was a no-brainer. “If you can cast a great actor in a smaller role, you have to do it, and Colin fits that bill,” he says. “He brings a real roundedness to the character that you wouldn’t necessarily get from a day player.”

Hanks recognized his role as foil for Kelley, noting a film could be made about Gilbert’s contributions to the trial alone, but in Vanderbilt’s script, his frisson with Kelley was aspect to focus on. “You have to be mindful of the story you’re telling, and whose story it is,” notes Hanks of his responsibility to the role. “In one sense you could see Gilbert as the bad guy in this story, but really, he’s an obstacle – a dissenting view for Kelley – and perhaps a simplistic view of what’s going on here.” It was fair, for instance, for Gilbert to call Kelley to task for breaking the conventional rules of their profession and daring to get personally involved, even to the degree that he met with Göring’s wife and daughter.

Berenbaum says it is notable that, like Howie Triest, Gilbert was Jewish and was likely as emotively affected by coming face to face with the architects of the Final Solution as he could have been. “The difference between him and Kelley is he worked hard to maintain the professional distance required by psychology,” the historian notes. “Douglas was breaking the rules. He prided himself on being a maverick and on being so smart that he could get away with anything. But he broke the rules of his profession. What psychiatrist would go and visit the wife and daughter of a prisoner, as Kelley did with Göring’s wife and daughter? Gilbert, on the other hand, is protecting himself behind the mask of being a psychologist, despite his being Jewish.”

In the movie, Gilbert represents what Hanks suggests is the path of least resistance – “Just label ’em monsters, it’s better that way,” – which was an understandable conclusion after so many years of bloodshed, with the horrors of the Holocaust so fresh in the collective memory. And it was certainly a popular one. Berenbaum notes the irony of Gustave Gilbert: “His conclusions did not stand the test of time in the way Kelley’s have, but he developed the prominence and renown that Kelley craved.”

“What I found so interesting about the script is that humanity was faced a type of uncertainty and hell that had never been seen before,” says Hanks. “Horrible war was nothing new, but the malice and intent of the Holocaust was so strikingly different from anything in modern history to that point. It was such a unique thing for enough people to band together to try to make sure it could never happen again.”

Referencing the conversations Vanderbilt’s script provoked on set between the entire ensemble, Hanks enthuses of his director: “He’s a guy that’s an encyclopedia of movies. He eats, breathes and drinks them in, and it’s always fun to work with directors like that. He knows that when you’re telling a story on this scale it can’t be one person’s story, and Jamie did an amazing job of being able to find little moments for each of the characters so that everyone has something to work towards. It’s not just the summation of parts; each one of these moments adds to the greater tapestry of the story you’re trying to tell.”

“Casting is a very strange chemistry that you need to get just right,” says Smith, noting in particular John Papsidera’s discernment when it came to finding the right actors to play the other members of the Nazi high command who are imprisoned with Göring, including German actors such as Andreas Pietschmann as Rudolf Hess and Dieter Riesle as Julius Streicher. “You’re not just putting a bunch of Nazis in a box together. They have to feel like they have a history with one another. You have to figure out who’s going to fit together, and how much they look like the people they’re playing. It takes a real skill to cast roles like this as well as John did.”

“We brought in some German actors to play some of them, and then we added some local cast from Budapest also,” says Vanderbilt. “The most important thing for us was that we wanted to make

them look historically accurate, because we do remember the faces of these Nazi party leaders. Andreas, who plays Hess, looks nothing like him in real life; he's like a matinee idol. Credit to Jan Sewell, who put Andreas in the make-up chair for three hours every day to turn him into Hess."

As he had done with the rest of the cast, Vanderbilt instructed the actors playing the Nazi prisoners not to watch any of the previous movies about the Nuremberg Trials, including the Stanley Kramer classic JUDGEMENT AT NUREMBERG, which covers a different aspect of the trials. "Andreas said, 'Oh, I know them all back to front already,'" Vanderbilt explains. "He said, 'Imagine being taught in elementary school that your country is responsible for the worst thing ever done in human history.' That's how Germany views this from the inside, and they put a lot of effort into education about the Holocaust. That stayed with me the entire time we were making the movie."

Crowe formed a tight bond with his fellow detainees, and the German actors in turn helped guide him on delivering the German dialogue, and on his accent. "Russell sort of took charge of them," laughs Vanderbilt. "Göring was their leader, and so Russell became their leader. They would march to set every day, and he really became their commanding officer."

"I didn't make them *march*," Crowe is at pains to point out. "But it was important for me to have an individual, personal connection with every one of these guys, as Göring would have had at the time. I had to be able to say to them, in my own way as the Reichsmarschall, 'You're going to be safe.'"

Crowe's point of connection with his fellow Nazi officers began with music, which has been his pursuit and passion for as long as he has been an actor. It was on the set of ROMPER STOMPER more than 30 years ago, he says, that he first discovered the power of a particular piece of music to unite his co-stars. In his research for NUREMBERG, he learned that Göring had been a keen mountain climber in his earlier years and had been quite successful at it. And so, he chose a traditional Bavarian Mountain folk song, "Muss i denn", to sing along with his castmates at the start of every day. Says Crowe: "Every time we'd get together, we'd sing this Bavarian hiking song, I'd go around the group, shaking each of their hands, and then we'd walk to the courtroom set having had that real experience together."

He adds: "But we weren't marching. We were just connected as a group of men going through this dark experience."

Crowe reflects on the entire ensemble Vanderbilt and Papsidera were able to piece together for NUREMBERG as inspiring as much passion in him as had the script when he'd signed on. "It's one of those situations where you're walking into the room full of gunfighters, and everybody in that room has put the work in, they know what their intention is, and they're ready to go," Crowe enthuses. "Everybody's prepared to begin in the stratosphere and try to get better from there. It was a great feeling, and it's really exciting from an actor's point of view. You start to tingle, because you realize that everybody is here aiming to be the very best they can be."

For Malek, the gift of NUREMBERG's screenplay is what it offers to characters who are given even the shortest amount of screentime. "Every character gets their moment, which is extremely hard to do without stalling the story the film is telling," the actor explains. "Many times, you find those scenes on the cutting room floor, with directors having to make awkward calls to actors. In this case, I don't think there were any moments missing."

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"Civilization asks whether law is so laggard as to be utterly helpless to deal with crimes of this magnitude by criminals of this order of importance. It does not expect that you can make war impossible. It does expect that your juridical action will put the forces of international law, its precepts, its prohibitions and, most of all, its sanctions, on the side of peace, so that men and women of good will, in all countries, may have 'leave to live by no man's leave, underneath the law.'"

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THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

James Vanderbilt never set out to issue a polemic to his audience with the script for NUREMBERG. His key priority from day one was always that the film be a gripping thriller about a remarkable chapter of history, particularly as generations removed from the events of the Second World War face an ever abstract relationship with it.

But there is no way to tell the story of Nuremberg without dwelling on the lessons it taught us, and the lessons it still has to teach. "It was very important for me that this movie feel more timeless than other movies that touch on this subject," Vanderbilt explains. "The thing about clichés is that they're true, and it's true that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. The reason the Holocaust is such an important event for people to remember is that it can happen again. The only way to make sure it doesn't is to remember it."

He continues: "Unfortunately, that means this movie is probably more relevant in 2025 than it might have been in 1995, and I wish it weren't. I wasn't interested in trying to craft something to reflect the political situation of the world today, because that felt minimizing when you're dealing with such an important, painful event in human history. But at the same time, the lessons of that era truly are the ones we forget at our peril."

"The quest for truth is always important," echoes Michael Shannon of his director's thoughts. "I know that can be murky subject, particularly as it becomes more elusive, but we can't just give up on it. We still must consider it a priority, and I hope this film will remind people of that."

Agrees Colin Hanks: "The film shows how seductive reframing history can be, and how dangerous it can be. My hope is that people come away from this movie with a better historical understanding of what happened at Nuremberg that made it such a unique moment in human history, but also maybe a little more understanding and awareness of the history of both past and present, and what our roles are within that."

Says Fischer: "Jamie has directed a powerful film that asks an important question: how is it that a group of seemingly intelligent, well-mannered men could be responsible for the most appalling atrocities of the last century?"

In the years that followed his intense and often unsettling work at Nuremberg, Douglas Kelley returned to the United States burdened by the weight of what he had witnessed and the insights he had gained into the psychology of the Nazi war criminals. What he found defied the easy narratives that much of the public craved: the Nazi leaders, in his estimation, were not monsters in the sense of

being irredeemably alien or pathologically insane, but ordinary men who had, through circumstance and choice, descended into unimaginable evil.

“It’s difficult to convince people that evil can be logical, or personable, or dangerously persuasive,” adds Rami Malek. “I think we want to label evil as simply evil. What Douglas Kelley was articulating was that the potential for complicity to evil lives within all of us. That’s a really challenging theme for people to accept.”

Kelley’s conclusion, unsettling in its implication for the broader human condition, was largely rejected by a postwar public eager to draw a sharp boundary between themselves and the perpetrators of atrocity. Kelley’s research and subsequent writings met with resistance, discomfort, and often outright denial. The notion that evil could assume a rational and even personable guise ran counter to the prevailing urge to view the Nazis as aberrations, rather than as reflections of darker potentials within humanity itself.

“This was the abyss that Kelley not only stared down into, but crawled inside of,” adds Fischer. “His time with Göring, and the conclusions he brought home with him from Nuremberg, were things he would never be able to shake.”

Haunted by the rejection of his findings and the psychological toll of his work, Kelley struggled to find peace upon his return to civilian life. His personal battles deepened over the years, exacerbated by professional frustrations and feelings of isolation. On New Year’s Day in 1958, Douglas Kelley ended his own life.

In the years since his death, as psychology and historical analysis evolved, later researchers echoed and expanded on his findings. Kelley’s conclusions, then, were ahead of his time, and those that followed stand on his shoulders. Hannah Arendt’s work on the “banality of evil”, which she described in her 1963 book EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM, aligns particularly closely with Kelley’s words, and she drew similar conclusions about Adolf Eichmann.

Berenbaum suspects, though, that Kelley might have disagreed with Arendt on one key point. “It’s in the movie that when Kelley sees the film from the concentration camps, he understands that there’s a difference between the evil and the evildoer. The evildoer might indeed be banal. But the evil really is not.”

Yet more researchers have further refined and shaped these theories, confirming Kelley’s conclusions. The work of Stanley Milgram on obedience and Philip Zimbardo’s Stanford prison experiment, for instance, revealed the disturbing ease with which individuals can be led to commit acts of cruelty under certain circumstances. Their studies mirrored Kelley’s view that context, authority, and collective dynamics often drive ordinary people toward participation in atrocity. Modern research continues to validate the idea that the potential for evil lies dormant in all of us, awaiting certain triggers.

Far from being a historical footnote, Kelley’s insights now form a cornerstone of our understanding of complicity and moral choice. His legacy is a sobering reminder that vigilance against cruelty must begin with recognizing our own capacity for it. In many ways, Kelley was right all along.

Summarizes Russell Crowe: “The reminder that these are human beings, and they made these decisions as a collective because that’s what they could get away with, is a very scary thing.” ❖