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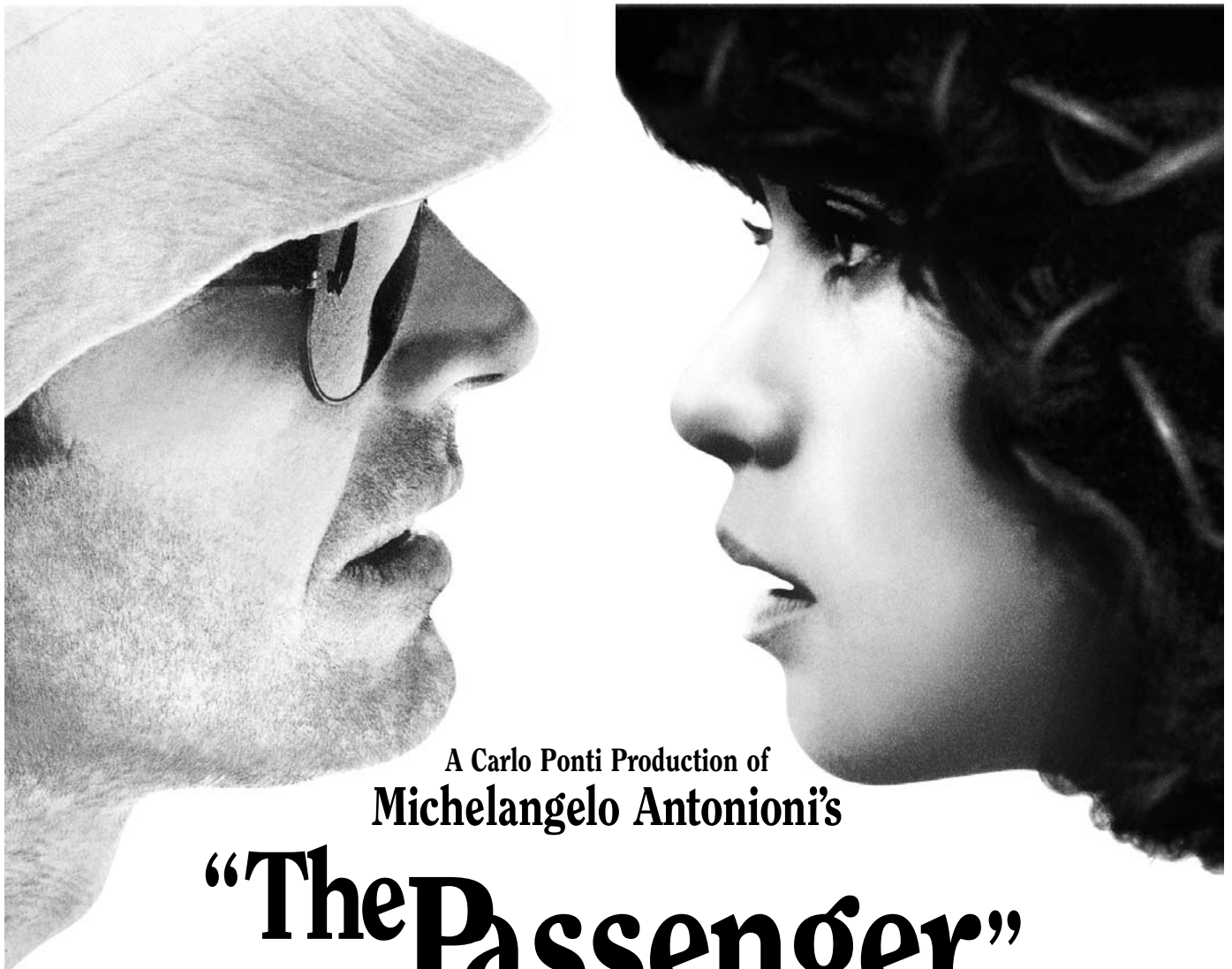
THE RETURN OF THE GREAT RARELY SEEN MASTERPIECE

**“DAZZLING... A SUPERIOR SUSPENSE MELODRAMA...  
PROBABLY ANTONIONI’S MOST ENTERTAINING FILM.”**

-Vincent Canby, THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Jack Nicholson**

**Maria Schneider**



A Carlo Ponti Production of  
**Michelangelo Antonioni's**

## **“The Passenger”**

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Originally released in 1975 and directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, **The Passenger** is a suspense story about a man trying to escape his own life. This haunting and unique film is a portrait of a drained journalist (played by a very young Jack Nicholson) whose deliverance is an identity exchange with a dead man. Shot on location in Africa, Spain, Germany and England.

**FRANCE/ITALY/USA • 1975/2005 • 119 mins • Color • In English**

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**MICHAEL WILMINGTON**


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There have been many years and changes in the landscape of film since 1975, but Michelangelo Antonioni's "The Passenger" still packs a wallop. It's also a movie with no easy passage to its dark heart. Re-released in its original form, the slightly longer European cut known as "Professione: Reporter," this moody Jack Nicholson political thriller remains a great, bizarre film, full of beauty, mystery and riddles with no answers.

Starring Nicholson as the ultimate identity thief, "The Passenger" first came out at a time when major studio films with big stars like Nicholson were far more artistically adventurous. Yet even in the vibrant era of "The Godfather" and "Nashville," "The Passenger" was a heady, peculiar brew: a cryptic, beautifully shot tale of the ultimate alienated protagonist (Nicholson as an on-the-run reporter) and the ultimate existential love affair (with an unnamed young Frenchwoman played by Maria Schneider).

"The Passenger," which followed the huge success of Antonioni's 1966 British-shot "Blow-Up" and the critical-commercial failure of his 1970 American-made "Zabriskie Point," was the last—and splashiest—of his informal English-language MGM studio trilogy. Shot in a scenically dazzling variety of locations, including Algeria, Germany, Britain and Spain, it's a film that also seems at first glance very tied to its era: a '70s hybrid travelogue-thriller full of radical politics, angst and anomie, with a typical Nicholson role (a hero fleeing himself, like Bobby Dupea in "Five Easy Pieces") and a heroine and villains whose identities and motives are almost completely obscure. But first glances are never enough in any Antonioni film; they always deepen as we watch.

Nicholson plays famous TV reporter David Locke, who, while covering a civil war in Africa, suddenly decides to switch identities with a man who dies in his hotel, a talkative stranger named David Robertson (Chuck Mulvehill). When Robertson expires, Nicholson's David—impulsively, it seems—exchanges their passport pictures, then carries the corpse to his own room and plunges into a new life.

Strangely, amid the chaos of the war and the mess David leaves behind—with his British wife, Rachel (Jenny Runacre) and meddling producer Knight (Ian Hendry)—the ruse somehow works, for a while. David keeps his new identity's itinerary in Germany and Spain before discovering that Robertson was a gunrunner with an important contract to fill with those African insurgents. Increasingly caught in a political crossfire, the poseur also falls into an affair with the feisty architecture student who keeps popping up along the way, played by Maria Schneider.

The movie spins out amid glamorous settings and unsolved puzzles, climaxing with one of the most famous cinematic coups of its era: a seven-minute, near-worldless single-take sequence in a small Spanish hotel where David's mysterious destiny—fused with that of the man whose life he stole—arrives in a sunny haze of prowling camera movements, anticipation and dread.

That meticulously shot shocker of a scene caps the film and Nicholson's performance; he simply disappears into the movie, the director finally upstaging his star. The extreme beauty of the film, finally, lies mostly in the way Antonioni manipulates all its dazzling visual surfaces, while Nicholson deploys his rowdy, engaging persona—to create an unforgettable fantasia on the themes of identity, revolution and death.



Nicholson made "The Passenger" in the same year as his Oscar-winning performance in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," and he was at the height of his early stardom: cute and thin and sardonic. And his richly detailed, highly spontaneous acting style works here.

"The Passenger" becomes a showcase for them both: for Nicholson's acting bravura and gutsy spontaneity and for Antonioni's austere mastery of mood and composition. There's something almost hypnotic about the way these two very different film artists, with their utterly dissimilar styles, meld together here—like a couple who seem all wrong for each other but still strike off incandescent sparks.

Up until "Blow-Up," Antonioni had always seemed, despite his frequent upper-class settings and subjects, a director grounded in neo-realism—and psychology. But his English-language movies were more dreamlike, none more so than "The Passenger." The screenplay, by Mark Peploe ("The Last Emperor") and film theorist/filmmaker Peter Wollen, ("Signs and Meaning in the Cinema"), is deliberately obscure and openly symbolic.

The restored version of "The Passenger" is longer by about seven minutes than the original stateside MGM release (one added scene shows David revisiting his old London digs) but still shorter than Antonioni's preferred original cut of 2 1/2 hours. Will we see that some day?

I hope so. Back in 1975, I was disappointed in "The Passenger" because of what I saw as its pretensions. Now, when fewer films on this level of ambition are made, with this kind of richness and resource, it looks as classic and lasting as "Blow-Up" or "L'Avventura," "Five Easy Pieces" or "Chinatown." Decades later, its riddles seem less puzzling, more poetic—even endearing. It's a movie from the past that still points ahead to the future: a cinematic rite of passage that raptly recalls a time when the world may have been as uncertain as now, but the movies were often lovelier and more daring.

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**THE PASSENGER**


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Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni; screenplay by Mark Peploe, Peter Wollen and Mr. Antonioni, based on a story by Mr. Peploe; produced by Carlo Ponti; executive producer, Alessandro Von Normann; director of photography, Luciano Tovoli; editors, Franco Arcalli and Mr. Antonioni. Running time: 119 minutes. This film has been rated PG.

WITH: Jack Nicholson (Locke), Maria Schneider (Girl), Jenny Runacre (Rachel), Ian Hendry (Knight), Stephen Berkoff (Stephen), Ambroise Bla (Achebe), Jose Maria Cafarel (Hotelkeeper), Chuck Mulvehill (Robertson).

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