

JANUS FILMS

booking@janusfilms.com • www.janusfilms.com

THE
RULES
OF THE
GAME

A film by
JEAN RENOIR

Considered one of the greatest films ever made, *The Rules of the Game* (*La règle du jeu*), by Jean Renoir, is a scathing critique of corrupt French society cloaked in a comedy of manners in which a weekend at a marquis's country château lays bare some ugly truths about a group of haut-bourgeois acquaintances. The film has had a tumultuous history: it was subjected to cuts after the violent response of the premiere audience in 1939, and the original negative was destroyed during World War II; it wasn't reconstructed until 1959. That version, which has stunned viewers for decades, is presented here in a gorgeous new 4K restoration.

France | 1939 | 106 minutes | Black & White | In French with English subtitles | 1.37:1 aspect ratio

Booking Inquiries: Janus Films
booking@janusfilms.com • 212-756-8822

Press Contact: Courtney Ott
courtney@cineticmedia.com • 646-230-6847

JEAN RENOIR BIOGRAPHY

Jean Renoir was born in the Montmartre district of Paris on September 15, 1894. Artistry suffused his family: his father, Pierre-Auguste, was the world-renowned impressionist painter; his older brother, Pierre, was a theater and movie actor; and his younger brother, Claude, was, briefly, Jean's directorial assistant and production manager. During his early years, Renoir's main caretaker was his mother Aline's cousin Gabrielle Renard, who took him to Guignol puppet performances and, as an early connoisseur of cinema, showed him his first films. For Renoir, exposure to both art forms at such a formative age would prove profoundly influential.

After a childhood spent with his family in the South of France, and having attended prestigious boarding schools, Renoir served in the French cavalry during World War I. A bullet left a permanent limp in his left leg, but his period of recovery from the injury also allowed him to immerse himself in cinema. The films of Charlie Chaplin, D. W. Griffith, and Erich von Stroheim were major inspirations; Renoir sought to emulate these titans in his first nine productions, all of which he directed in the waning days of the silent era. None made a profit, however, and Renoir was forced to sell his father's paintings to finance them or recuperate their losses.

Renoir earned his first successes in the 1930s, when he directed classics such as *La chienne* (*The Bitch*, 1931), *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (*Boudu sauvé des eaux*, 1932), and *The Crime of Monsieur Lange*

(*Le crime de Monsieur Lange*, 1936). At times, these successes were also the object of intense controversy, as in the case of *Boudu*, which provoked riots for extolling its title character's antibourgeois behavior. Meanwhile, with films such as *Monsieur Lange* and *The Lower Depths* (*Les bas-fonds*, 1936), Renoir became increasingly connected to the left-wing politics of the Popular Front. Toward the end of the thirties, he directed two of his most profitable and critically acclaimed films, *Grand Illusion* (*La grande illusion*, 1937) and *La bête humaine* (*The Human Beast*, 1938), both starring *The Lower Depths'* Jean Gabin. Renoir then used his commercial and artistic clout to cofound an independent production company, Nouvelle Édition Française, whose first and only release was Renoir's dream project: *The Rules of the Game* (*La règle du jeu*, 1939). Now widely



considered one of the greatest films of all time, *Rules* was nonetheless met with significant critical and popular derision, and its poor showing at the box office helped encourage Renoir to leave the French film industry for Hollywood.

Renoir's Hollywood career began in 1941 with *Swamp Water*. He would make five more American studio films, including *The River* (1951), a Technicolor production shot in India. His long-awaited return to the French film industry occurred in 1955 with *French Cancan*. He would direct four more films in his native land; his final movie, a collection of shorts titled *The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir* (1970), an international coproduction made for television. Prior to his death in 1979, Renoir also wrote several plays, novels, a biography of his painter father, and an autobiography.

JEAN RENOIR FILMOGRAPHY

1924	<i>Backbiters</i> (<i>Catherine, ou Une vie sans joie</i>) (codirected with Albert Dieudonné; reedited and rereleased in 1927)	1937	<i>Grand Illusion</i> (<i>La grande illusion</i>)
1925	<i>Whirlpool of Fate</i> (<i>La fille de l'eau</i>)	1938	<i>La Marseillaise</i>
1926	<i>Nana</i>		<i>La bête humaine</i> (<i>The Human Beast</i>)
1927	<i>Charleston Parade</i> (<i>Sur un air de Charleston</i>) (short)	1939	<i>The Rules of the Game</i> (<i>La règle du jeu</i>)
	<i>Marquitta</i> (presumed lost)	1941	<i>Swamp Water</i>
1928	<i>The Little Match Girl</i> (<i>La petite marchande d'allumettes</i>) (short)	1943	<i>This Land Is Mine</i>
	<i>Tire-au-flanc</i> (<i>The Sad Sack</i>)	1944	<i>Salute to France</i> (short documentary; codirected with Garson Kanin)
	<i>The Tournament</i> (<i>Le tournoi dans la cité</i>)	1945	<i>The Southerner</i>
1929	<i>Le bled</i> (<i>The Boondocks</i>)	1946	<i>The Diary of a Chambermaid</i>
1931	<i>Baby's Laxative</i> (<i>On purge bébé</i>)	1947	<i>The Woman on the Beach</i>
	<i>La chienne</i> (<i>The Bitch</i>)	1951	<i>The River</i>
1932	<i>Night at the Crossroads</i> (<i>La nuit du carrefour</i>)	1953	<i>The Golden Coach</i> (<i>Le carrosse d'or</i>)
	<i>Boudu Saved from Drowning</i> (<i>Boudu sauvé des eaux</i>)	1955	<i>French Cancan</i>
1933	<i>Chotard and Company</i> (<i>Chotard et Cie</i>)	1956	<i>Elena and Her Men</i> (<i>Elena et les hommes</i>)
1934	<i>Madame Bovary</i>	1959	<i>Experiment in Evil</i> (<i>Le testament du Docteur Cordelier</i>)
1935	<i>Toni</i>		<i>Picnic on the Grass</i> (<i>Le déjeuner sur l'herbe</i>)
1936	<i>The Crime of Monsieur Lange</i> (<i>Le crime de Monsieur Lange</i>)	1962	<i>The Elusive Corporal</i> (<i>Le caporal épinglé</i>)
	<i>The Lower Depths</i> (<i>Les bas-fonds</i>)	1970	<i>The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir</i> (<i>Le petit théâtre de Jean Renoir</i>)
	<i>A Day in the Country</i> (<i>Partie de campagne</i> ; unfinished; officially released in 1946)		



PRODUCTION HISTORY

Jean Renoir began work on *The Rules of the Game* in 1939, when everything seemed to be going the director's way. *Grand Illusion* (1937) had not only been a hit in his native France but had also won over audiences and critics abroad on the way to becoming the first foreign-language film nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. And his most recent feature, 1938's *La bête humaine*, had played to packed Paris theaters for months, solidifying both Renoir and star Jean Gabin as towering figures in the French film industry.

Renoir used his hard-won artistic capital to form an independent production company with his younger brother, Claude, and his friends André Zwobada, Olivier Billiou, and Camille François. Named Nouvelle Édition Française (NEF), the company was set up as a cooperative to which each partner would contribute 10,000 francs and through which it would produce two films a year. *The Rules of the Game* was to be NEF's inaugural release; unfortunately, the troubled production would also be its last.

In early 1939, Renoir went to the secluded north-central commune of Bourron-Marlotte with Zwobada and Carl Koch to begin work on the *Rules* script. An early NEF press notice described Renoir's project as an adaptation of playwright Alfred de Musset's *Les caprices de Marianne* (*The Moods of Marianne*), a nineteenth-century comedy about romantic misunderstandings and jealousies. This signaled an abrupt shift from Renoir's recent work, which had instead been heavily indebted to the naturalistic writings of Émile Zola and the Popular Front sentiments of the poetic-realist movement. But eventually, Renoir scrapped *Les caprices* as his source material so that he could fashion a wholly original narrative in the spirit of Musset—a narrative that would affectionately, humorously, and yet critically send up the amoral, self-absorbed French bourgeoisie. While writing, Renoir delved into more of Musset's oeuvre, as well as Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* and works by Pierre de Marivaux and Pierre Beaumarchais.

Unable to cast first choices for many of the film's major roles, Renoir turned to unorthodox alternatives. For Marquis Robert de La Chesnaye, the director picked Marcel Dalio, an actor best

known for his burlesque and villainous roles. Playing Dalio against type fulfilled one of Renoir's credos: "I think it's always very helpful, in film, in whatever you're writing, to go against conventions." And for Marquise Christine de La Chesnaye, Renoir discovered—or, rather, rediscovered—Nora Gregor, the wife of Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg, a profascist (yet anti-Hitler) Austrian prince who had emigrated to France during the Anschluss. Though she hadn't acted on-screen in six years, and though the NEF cofounders considered her unsuitable for the film because of her age and her difficulties with the French language, Renoir was so overwhelmed by Gregor's aristocratic grace and personal beauty that he rewrote Christine as the refined daughter of a famous Austrian conductor and not just a bored, party-throwing housewife.

In February 1939, in the midst of fine-tuning the screenplay, and after shooting some initial interiors in a studio, Renoir traveled to the Château de la Ferté-Saint-Aubin in Sologne to complete location shots set at the marquis's luxurious estate. Several weeks of rain prevented much of the planned exterior shooting, but Renoir revised the script in order to accommodate the weather, as for a scene in which guests arrive at the marquis's château during a thunderstorm. The rain also significantly cut into the time that Pierre Renoir, the director's older brother and an accomplished thespian, had set aside to perform as Octave, the best friend of André Jurieux (Roland Toutain), a pilot smitten by Christine. No longer able to shoot all of his scenes, Pierre passed the role over to Jean, whose gregarious demeanor and portly stature occasioned a rewriting of the character as a sort of bohemian court jester to the marquis and his aristocratic set.

Other effects of the rain delay were ultimately more damaging to the film. Renoir had rented two adjoining Pathé soundstages in Joinville, where production designers Eugène Lourié and Max Douy had constructed expensive, ornate sets—which remained unused while Renoir and his cast and crew waited out the poor weather in Sologne. As NEF ran out of money, Zwobada procured an advance from Gaumont in exchange for that company's exclusive right to screen *Rules* at its theaters. This gave Jean Jay, Gaumont's director, the ability to assert his creative input into the production.

Even after the rain cleared, *Rules* proceeded laboriously. Typically known for instilling a harmonious camaraderie among the cast and crew, Renoir was less adept at working with an incomplete script, which forced him to improvise certain scenes. Executing the director's desired long takes and deep-focus shots necessitated more than the usual number of rehearsals and takes, while Gregor encountered challenges in acting naturally on camera, partly because of her less-than-fluent French. Once more, Renoir worked around the obstacles before him, this time developing two other major female roles—the marquis's mistress Geneviève (Mila Parély) and the marquise's flirtatious attendant Lisette (Paulette Goddard)—to compensate for Christine's diminishing presence. Yet all of these issues proved tricky to manage as Renoir took on dual responsibilities as both director and actor.

When he arrived at Sologne to view the material thus far, Jay was displeased, focusing much of his ire on Renoir's performance as Octave. Renoir thought Michel Simon might take over the role, but such a substitution would require extensive—and expensive—reshoots; instead, Jay suggested that Octave's screen time be significantly reduced. Sticking to his guns, Renoir not only refused to downplay Octave but actually gave the character greater import within the narrative. However, as if to offset Jay's disappointment, Renoir agreed to return to Joinville midway through the Sologne shoot in order to finally make use of the soundstages there—just one week of studio time remained, with only half the film finished. A small team remained at the château to film what would become its memorable hunting scene.

By the time shooting wrapped in June 1939, *Rules* was the most expensive production in the history of French cinema, costing more than five million francs, two million of which exceeded the original budget. Alongside his editor and romantic partner, Marguerite Renoir, Jean assembled an initial, three-hour rough cut of the film, then rushed to reduce that epic length to 113 minutes for its July 1939 premiere at the Colisée Theatre in Paris. This wouldn't be the final version of *Rules*, however. Disappointed audience members were not just negative but outright hostile, with many Colisée spectators whistling, booing, and even attempting to burn down the theater out of hatred for the film. *Rules* played there for only three weeks; to salvage the film's theatrical run,

Renoir decided to reedit. Theater managers applied further pressure by demanding cuts, while Jay sought to completely omit Octave from the narrative. Leaving his own performance intact, Renoir nonetheless removed thirteen minutes from the film. Later editing would trim the run time from one hundred to ninety minutes, then from ninety to eighty-five minutes.

Several factors led to *Rules*' poor reception. Having learned of the production problems of Renoir's ambitious project, many film journalists primed the public for a hubristic disaster. And the onset of World War II meant that Renoir had to race to release the film in July—when cinema attendance typically waned—and that the theatrical premiere paired *Rules* with an ill-fitting patriotic documentary. Even after the debut, the various attempts to reedit *Rules* into a more palatable form ended up making an already complex film unintelligible to some audience members. Finally, the intense political climate in France during the late thirties—with the Popular Front divided, fascism on the rise, and war imminent—explains much of the immediate fate suffered by *Rules*. The portrayal of a Jewish marquis and a foreign marquise outraged the French right, which deemed it a provocation against national tradition and honor. Overall, the film was decried as “unpatriotic” in depicting a declining and self-destructing upper class; the Union Sacrée, a French fascist organization, went so far as to picket theaters where *Rules* was being shown. Renoir's reputation as a pacifist and a supporter of both the Popular Front and the Communist Party didn't help matters, but the director never laid blame at the feet of his political opponents: “There was no question of contrivance,” he once stated. “My enemies had nothing to do with its failure. At every session I attended, I could feel the unanimous disapproval of the audience.” NEF went bankrupt soon after *Rules* left theaters.

Not surprisingly, the French government banned *Rules* three months after its premiere, as war broke out across Europe. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced the film for possessing a “demoralizing” effect on the young during a time of revived nationalism, and when *Rules* was rereleased after the end of World War II (in its eighty-five-minute form), it was quickly banned once more. Under German occupation, the French puppet government also placed the film on its list of verboten culture.



RESTORATION HISTORY

The miraculous restoration of *The Rules of the Game* began in 1942, when an Allied bombing over Boulogne-sur-Seine, France, accidentally struck the G.M. Film Lab, home of the film's original negative. Renoir's movie was thought irrevocably lost until right after the war, when an eighty-five-minute version was discovered in a box and afterward shown at film clubs, cinémathèques, and festivals. With its reputation thus undergoing reconsideration, efforts were undertaken to find and restore *Rules* as Jean and Marguerite Renoir had edited it for its 1939 premiere.

In 1956, two film-lab technicians and cofounders of the Société des Grands Films Classiques, Jean Gaborit and Jacques Maréchal, retrieved 224 boxes containing positives, negatives, and sound mixes of *Rules* from the ruins of the G.M. Film Lab. With input from Renoir, the film was restored over the course of two years into a version that—though not including a single scene that Renoir deemed

unimportant—was as close as possible to its intended original 113-minute form.

The reconstructed *Rules* premiered at the 1959 Venice Film Festival, where it was greeted with rapturous acclaim. In attendance at the screening were nouvelle vague luminaries Alain Resnais, Claude Chabrol, and Louis Malle, all of whom proclaimed Renoir to be one of the few grand masters of world cinema and a visionary artistic hero to the new generation of French directors. The reevaluation of the originally misunderstood and underappreciated *Rules* brought with it Renoir's creative and personal vindication: though the French public wouldn't see the restored version of the film until a 1965 theatrical run (it was released in the United States in 1961), the reconstruction's Venice premiere caused the director to break down in tears as he finally witnessed the resurrection of the dream project that he had once believed to be lost to time.

TRIVIA

The title *The Rules of the Game* plays on the title of Pierre de Marivaux's 1730 play *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (*The Game of Love and Chance*).

Jean Renoir intended *The Rules of the Game* to be his first color film in order to fully depict Sologne, a region of France that Renoir's father, Pierre-Auguste, regretted never having captured in his paintings. However, in 1939, color cinematography was still a rarity, and Renoir's negotiations with Technicolor fell apart due to the prohibitive cost of procuring the company's patented process.

During the writing of the *Rules* script, Renoir listened to the work of baroque composers such as François Couperin, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Jean-Baptiste Lully, and André Grétry, in order to imagine “the sort of people who danced to that music.” The film's soundtrack includes selections by Mozart, Chopin, Vincent Scotto, Camille Saint-Saëns, Louis Desormes, Roger Désormière, Léopold Gangloff, and Louis Byrec.

Renoir lifted Octave, as well as that character's defining personal qualities, from Alfred de Musset's play *Les caprices de Marianne* (*The Moods of Marianne*).

Certain key scenes in *Rules* were shot with deep-focus photography in order to capture action occurring on multiple planes of the visual field. Renoir explained that, in shooting these complex scenes, he and cinematographer Jean Bachelet “ordered some special lenses, very fast lenses, but ones that still gave us considerable depth, so that we could keep our backgrounds in focus almost all the time.”

Renoir's son, Alain, who was only seventeen years old at the time, served as a camera operator on *Rules*.

Prior to his international fame, photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson played the English servant in *Rules*. He was also an assistant director on the film.

In one scene, the servants and maids discuss—and, in some cases, criticize, in anti-Semitic terms—the marquis's familial background as a “Rosenthal.” Marcel Dalio, the actor who portrays the marquis, plays a character with the last name Rosenthal in Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1937).

As part of *Rules*' extensive promotional campaign, a crossword puzzle was published in a newspaper three days before the film's release; those who solved the puzzle won free tickets to its premiere.

Renoir stated that the one scene missing from the restored version of *Rules* “isn't very important. It's a scene with me and [Roland] Toutain that deals with the maids' sexual interest. As you can see, that isn't a primary theme.”

The eighty-five-minute version of *Rules* includes a different ending from that of the original and reconstructed versions. In the shortened version, Octave (Renoir) never agrees to run away with Christine; instead, he encourages André to meet her at the greenhouse only because he wishes the best for his good friend—not because he feels compelled to redeem his betrayal of having courted Christine behind André's back.