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# A letter from Francis Ford Coppola, director of TETRO!

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Dear Film Club member,

It is a dream come true to be able to make personal films and have them shown in great theatres such as Landmark's. *Tetro* is the kind of film I might have been making 35 years ago, had my career not taken an abrupt and sudden turn as it did with *The Godfather*. Sure, it was exhilarating to find myself an important Hollywood director, with all that came with it. But as the years went on, I found myself trying to avoid becoming a gangster film director, with all that came with that: stabbings, shootings, car crashes and strangulations. It became pretty clear that even if well-paid, a Hollywood director is expected to do what the company who employs him wants. And most times it is a genre film of some type, if not a gangster film, then take your choice between a thriller, a caper film, a romantic comedy (nothing wrong with that) or sci-fi epic (nor that). I found myself dissatisfied, and frustrated over the fact that even though I had made successful films and won plenty of awards, I still would have to go, hat in hand, and beg permission to make something really new.

With *Apocalypse Now*, I ultimately found I had to finance it myself. Financing movies is a perilous activity, especially when the films are as unusual as I wanted to make. At first *Apocalypse Now* seemed as if it would bury me—the initial reaction wasn't good, despite some acknowledged spectacular scenes, but it was deemed too philosophical or worse, 'arty'—which is the ultimate damning word that can be used on a film. Well, I thought, weren't most of Ingmar Bergman' or Michelangelo Antonioni's films 'arty but good'? As were the many films of Federico Fellini or Akira Kurosawa? Maybe those films weren't financial powerhouses, but they stayed with you and were inspirational. And also, they were all *different* from any other films being made. That in the end is my main criteria for enjoying a film: that I never saw it before or anything quite like it.

Many years went by.

Then, taking inspiration from my daughter who had learned the very same tricks from me, I decided to return to my youth, and realizing that the smaller the budget of a film the greater the ideas of that film could be, began to self-finance the very kinds of films I had hoped to make at the beginning. It was like trying to find my place, after being away a long time. I took a story from Mircea Eliade, *Youth Without Youth*. When it was done, I found the film audience had ventured even further away from anything other than the pre-made, pre-measured genre films that I had tried to escape from, and now wanted even their independent films to be mini-Hollywood ventures. No matter, I thought, the idea was to find myself and I had done that. Now, the next step was to pick up where I had left off, and write an original story and screenplay, something I hadn't done for 30 years since *The Conversation*.

The result is *Tetro*, which you are about to see soon at a Landmark theatre near you. I hope you will find it moving, as it is drawn from real emotions related to my experiences and life—though not in any way autobiographical. I hope you wish me well on this new career of mine. It was the one I always wanted from the beginning, to be an independent filmmaker, writing stories and making personal films. God knows what will come next!

Sincerely,  
Francis Coppola

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