



The Bourne Ultimatum - "Know Thyself"

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Know thyself

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Keywords: Identity, revenge, truth, guilt, understanding

Film title: *The Bourne Ultimatum*

Tagline(s): Remember everything. Forgive nothing.

Director: Paul Greengrass

Screenplay: Tony Gilroy, Scott Z. Burns and George Nolfi, based on the novel by Robert Ludlum

Starring: Matt Damon, Julia Stiles, David Strathairn, Scott Glen, Paddy Considine

Distributor: Universal Pictures

Cinema Release Date: 3 August 2007 (USA); 17 August 2007 (UK)

DVD Distributor: Universal

DVD Release date: December 2007

Certificate: PG-13 (USA); 12A (UK)

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Warning: Contains plot spoilers.

‘Something happened to me. And I need to know what it was. Or I’ll never be free of this.’ *The Bourne Ultimatum* continues the explosive action which characterised the previous two Bourne films. Still suffering from injuries sustained in *The Bourne Supremacy*, Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) bursts on to the screen hotly pursued by the Moscow police, and he hardly seems to stop running for the rest of the film. He’s discovered his past crimes, he’s even tried to make amends for them, but to bring an end to everything, he has to find out how it all began. Based on best-selling novels by Robert Ludlum, the Bourne films follow the action-packed adventures of Jason Bourne, an amnesiac CIA assassin, as he struggles to stay alive long enough to discover who he really is, and come to terms with what he has done. *The Bourne Ultimatum* has been the most successful of the trilogy, both at the box-office and with critics (see variety.com and [Time](http://Time.com)). Directed by Paul Greengrass, it is set apart from other spy films like the James Bond franchise by its edgy camera work and the paranoid realism of the storylines.

The tempo of *The Bourne Ultimatum* never slackens as Jason Bourne fights his way across the globe in pursuit of the truth. Unfazed by his injuries and the fact that the full force of the CIA is bent on eliminating him, Bourne is single-minded in his quest. He is constantly haunted by the past. Unable to fully remember it, he is also unable to escape its influence. As he explains to sympathetic CIA operative Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles): ‘I’ve tried to apologise for what I’ve done, for what I am. None of it makes it any better.’ The only way for Bourne to finally come to terms with what he has done, and to move on with his life, is to find out the whole truth about who he is.

The question of identity has been the central theme through all three Bourne films. In *The Bourne Ultimatum*, however, it is not only Jason Bourne who has doubts about his place in the world. He is aided in his mission by two CIA agents, both of whom act against orders because they refuse to participate in the morally dubious actions of the Agency. Nicky Parsons’ involvement with Bourne leads her into great danger, and as a result, she is forced to go into hiding and change

her identity. Pam Landy (Joan Allen), an operative overseeing the operation to find Bourne, increasingly questions her role saying, 'this isn't what I signed up for'. It is only the villains of the film who are perfectly content with who they are and what they are doing. The question of identity is one which many people can relate to. Few people are entirely happy with everything about themselves and, while most of us have no difficulty remembering our past actions, we may still, like Jason Bourne, wonder how we ended up in our current situations. Why do we think, speak, and act the way we do? Is the person we become determined by our genes or environment? Do we have any control over the choices we make? Is it possible for us to change? These are issues which cut to the heart of what it means to be human, so it is no wonder that we can relate so powerfully to Jason Bourne's desperate quest to make sense of who he is.

Will his discovery of the truth, however, give Jason Bourne the freedom he craves? By the end of the film, he has remembered everything. He finally knows who he is, and understands how he came to be that way. Bourne finds his answers by returning to those who shaped his life and started him on his path. In a similar way, many people look for the answers to their own questions about identity in the idea of a God who created them. The Bible's view of humans is that we are created in the image of God. This is where our compassion, our courage, and all the goodness inside us comes from. However, the Bible also asserts that people have rejected God, choosing to live their own way, and this is where all the wrong we see in the world has come from. When we look at ourselves and wonder how we came to be what we are, the Bible tells us that it is our choice that brought us to this point.

Having come to terms with what he has learned, Jason Bourne is able to cast aside his old identity, to declare, 'I'm no longer Jason Bourne', and to choose a new life. His enlightenment is the happy ending the trilogy demands, but we are left wondering whether Jason Bourne has truly escaped his old life. He retains his old skills and the memories will not disappear simply because he understands what has happened. It is difficult to imagine him enjoying a quiet, ordinary existence. The Bible offers a stronger hope than this. As with Bourne, the first step to freedom is to

understand who we are, and to accept that our situation is the result of our own choice. However, Christians believe that God has not given up on us, and his policy is not to eliminate rogue agents. Instead, Christ gives his own life us, making it possible for the sins of our old life to be forgiven and for those who accept it to be given a new identity. It's not an identity that requires us to dye our hair and hide in the shadows, but the offer of a new life and the chance to be who we were created to be.

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