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USA 1987

Gardens of Stone

6.15 Prince Charles

Director: Francis Coppola

Production Company: Tri-Star Pictures

Producers: Michael I Levy, Francis Coppola

Screenplay: Ronald Bass

Based on the novel by: Nicholas Proffitt

Photography (DeLuxe Colour): Jordan Cronenweth

British Distributor: Columbia Pictures, 19 Wells St, London W1

Export Agent: Tri-Star Pictures, 1875 Century Park East, Los Angeles, CA 90067

Leading Players: James Caan, Anjelica Huston, James Earl Jones, D B Sweeney, Dean Stockwell

Running Time: 111 mins

Festival: Moscow

The gardens are those of Arlington National Cemetery, resting place of slain presidents and fighting men. In 1968-9 up to 15 victims of Vietnam are buried every day and it's James Caan's job to train the Old Guard, America's toy army, spit-and-polished for ceremonials and burials. Caan gives an impressively tough performance as the wisened-up vet who's fighting the army bureaucracy, knowing America can't win in Vietnam. Unlike most Vietnam movies, including Coppola's own *Apocalypse Now*, *Gardens of Stone* is set entirely in America. It has its faults and is perhaps too anxious to allow every faction an articulate voice – Caan and James Earl Jones' embittered soldiers, Anjelica Huston's *Washington Post* peacenik, a gung-ho volunteer, a right-wing congressional aide, all of whom come together at a dinner party – but Ronald Bass's script bristles with wit and insight, focusing on the blur of contradictions about the war. Coppola directs the ensemble scenes like a master and the movie is a beautifully crafted, bookish alternative to the combat horrors of Stone, Irvin and Kubrick. – Adrian Turner.