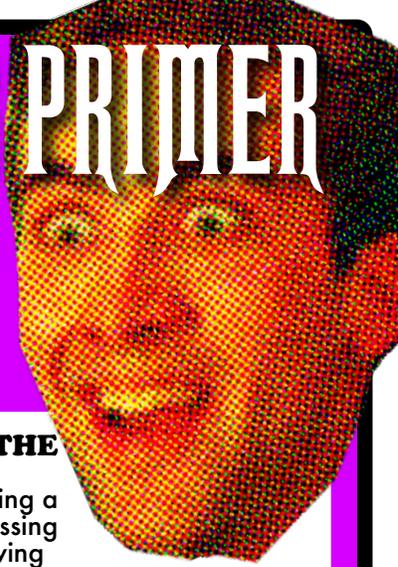


# NICOLAS CAGE MEGA-ACTING PRIMER

**NICOLAS CAGE** is an Academy Award winner, an action star, a prolific headliner of dubious direct-to-video thrillers, and a true original. Though well known in a variety of "normal" roles, he's become a source of fascination for his odd character choices and heightened style that inspired one critic to coin the term "mega-acting," for times when "overacting" is exactly the right amount of acting. This is not a complete list of Cage's top performances, but some of those that best demonstrate the approach he has called "Nouveau Shamanic" or "Western kabuki."



## PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED (1986)

Much of the cast thought director **Francis Ford Coppola** was crazy for letting his nephew do this role in a nasal voice he based on Gummy's pal Pokey. But it worked out okay.

## VAMPIRE'S KISS (1989)

Cage plays a snooty literary agent convinced he's turning into a vampire. Through the course of the movie he evolves from a raving jerk to pretty much a silent film monster. Known for a scene where he swallowed a live cockroach, but more notable for the one where he shouts the entire alphabet during a tirade about organizing files, this is one of his best.

## WILD AT HEART (1990)

**David Lynch** created one of the few movies where everything is as amped up as Cage. He plays Sailor Ripley, an Elvis-obsessed "robber and manslayer" in a snakeskin jacket whose hobbies include bashing guys' heads in and pulling over to the side of the highway to blast heavy metal and do karate kicks.

## DEADFALL (1993)

Cage's Eddie is not in attendance for the entire running time of this weird Michael Biehn con-man thriller, but when he is he gives *Vampire's Kiss* competition for the most-mega-ever trophy. He looks like Tony Clifton and punctuates his dialogue with Mick Jagger poses and twirls. He had so much fun he resurrected the character in the otherwise unrelated 2017 film *Arsenal*.

## KISS OF DEATH (1995)

Cage's mega in this underrated **Barbet Schroeder**-directed Neo-noir is mostly confined to a scene where he grieves by jumping up and down. But his muscle-bound villain Little Junior Brown refuses to use metal silverware and is introduced in a strip club bench-pressing Hope Davis.

## FACE/OFF (1997)

**John Woo**'s masterpiece of hyper-action-melodrama-meets-sci-fi gives Cage one of his great double roles. Most relevant to our topic are his scenes as the joyously wicked, Chiclet-chewing terrorist Castor Troy, though he's arguably even more impressive as hero Sean Archer forced to live behind his enemy's face.

## SNAKE EYES (1998)

Cage stars as a garish, crooked Atlantic City cop forced to summon up some amount of decency to foil a conspiracy happening under his watch. He comically darts and struts around, is humiliated in fights and unheroically whines while **Brian DePalma** directs just like Cage acts, inventing new methods of visual storytelling and destroying the myth that a shot should never call attention to itself.

## BRINGING OUT THE DEAD (1999)

Imagine the pressure of being a nightshift paramedic: witnessing trauma and mayhem, knowing lives depend on your competence, popping pills to stay awake. In this stressful, hallucinogenic black comedy directed by **Martin Scorsese** and written by Paul Schrader, Cage plays a burnt out EMT who sees ghosts of the people he failed to save.

## MATCHSTICK MEN (2003)

In this entertaining **Ridley Scott** caper, Cage plays an obsessive-compulsive con-man. Trying to control his tics, he precisely modulates his energy from subtle to downright explosive. Favorite moment: flipping out at the pharmacy when someone calls him out for cutting in line.

## THE WICKER MAN (2006)

Neil LaBute's poorly received, arguably misunderstood remake turned Cage into a meme, but it's required viewing if you want to see him unleashed. He brings his entire cache of hysterics and dark humor as the belligerent victim of a matriarchal cult. Highlights including yelling at children about a doll, screaming about bees and, of course, running around punching people while wearing a stolen bear costume.

## BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS (2009)

Cage teaming with **Werner Herzog** to sort of remake an Abel Ferrara film makes for a berserk and at times poetic subversion of cop movies. As a corrupt officer addicted to crack, Vicodin and gambling, Cage rampages his way through a murder case and various money problems while hallucinating lizards and ghostly breakdancers.

## MOM AND DAD (2017)

Here Cage plays a dorky dad in the middle of a mid-life crisis. Then a mysterious virus gives all the parents in the world an uncontrollable urge to kill their own children. A chain saw is involved.

## MANDY (2018)

In this his hazy, psychedelic revenge drama of hippie cults and demonic bikers, Cage rides a 4-wheeler with a battle ax on his back and has an emotionally raw one take scene roaring through the stages of grief while drinking vodka in the bathroom with no pants on. Co-written by Scarecrow alum Aaron Stewart-Ahn.



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