“You know who's going to inherit the Earth? Arms dealers. Because everyone else is too busy killing each other. That's the secret to survival. Never go to war. Especially with yourself.” - Yuri
Lord of War (2005) is a political film inspired by a true story; that charts the rise and falls of one man’s hunger for success. Yuri Orlov, who is played by Nicolas Cage, is a capitalist who saw the ending of the Cold War as an opportunity to become prosperous. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the supply of the Soviets weapons became obtainable at barter prices. Following soon after, a vast amount of the Soviet military technology soon begins to depart into the hands of weapons dealers; who intend to sell to the highest bidder. Yuri Orlov is one of these men, he demonstrates throughout the film how his wealth stems from selling warring nations the means to continue on their deadly course. However, his (Orlov’s) actions do not go unnoticed. Jack Valentine, an Interpol agent and the voice of morality, is convinced that Yuri’s hands are indeed dirty, and he is determined to prove so.

**Portrayal of the Business World**

The business world within this movie is portrayed in an extremely negative light. It is a business which is corrupt, gluttonous, and vacant; vacant of sincerity, trust, and compassion. There are so many ethical issues that are brought to light in this film, that it is almost overwhelming. I will do my best to touch base on every one. Firstly I will provide a more detailed clarification of the movie.

The movie is narrated by Yori Orlov; his story begins in Brooklyn, New York City. When he (Yuri) was a young boy his family left Ukraine for the United States. In order to escape the Soviets his family pretends to be Jewish; which sets the stage for the dishonesty which is seen throughout the rest of the film. Due to this “favorable condition” Yuri and his family were able to make a standard living by owning and running a restaurant; where Yuri’s brother, Vitaly, is the chef. However, this lifestyle was not enough for Yuri, who desired more.

When Yuri sees a Russian Mafia boss kill two men in the street, he (Yuri) sees this as a
new opportunity that would yield higher profits; it is then that he decides to provide another “necessity” (as Yuri saw it), which is guns. Yuri persuades his younger brother, Vitaly, to be his partner in the gun smuggling business; unfortunately, Vitaly accepts the position and from then on we see him (Vitaly) question his own moral values, which ultimately lead to his own death.

The two brothers begin selling guns to gangsters; however Yuri finds the margins are still too low; demonstrating the greed that in captures him. It is then that Yuri visits the Arms Convention with a proposal for Simeon Weisz, a seasoned arms dealer. Simeon Weisz gets Yuri and Vitaly’s business started off by enabling them to sell Israeli weapons that the US military left behind from the 1982 Lebanon War. As a result, their commerce expands, especially after the Soviet collapses which made available even larger military artillery.

Yuri moves on to selling arms to the West African dictator of Liberia, André Baptiste, and his demonizing son. Baptiste, pleased with his business relationship with Yuri (who he calls “lord of war”), begins paying with blood diamonds. This instigates the troubling points in Yuri’s life.

**Ethical Dilemmas**

“The only problem with an honest buck is they're so hard to make - the margins are too low, too many people are doin' it” - Yuri

It is obvious that Yuri is out for making an easy dollar; ethically or not, in his case unethically. A statement that he makes during the beginning of the movie is the following:

“Selling guns is like selling vacuum cleaners; you make calls, pound the pavement, and take orders. I was an equal-opportunity merchant of death; I supplied to every army but the Salvation Army. I sold Israeli-made Uzis to Muslims...I delivered Communist-made bullets to fascists...I even shipped cargo to Afghanistan while they were fighting my fellow Soviets. I never sold to Osama bin Laden though—not on any moral grounds; back then, he was always bouncing
Not one of the ethical issues that I have, or will, be describing was ever truly resolved in this film. Yuri continues doing business as he always had, even after his brother is killed during one of their business negotiations, regardless of being disowned by his parents, and even when his wife and child leave him. However, it is noticeable that Yuri is aware of his actions and is struggling between his own moralities and his trail to success. He makes the following comment during the end of the movie, which hints at his internal tug of war: “My family has disowned me... my wife and son have left me... my brother is dead. Trust me; I fully appreciate the seriousness of my situation.” This, of course, is after he has been arrested by Valentine, which we later find out he (Yuri) will never face any serious consequences, based on Yori’s confession.

“The reason I'll be released is the same reason you think I'll be convicted. I do rub shoulders with some of the most vile, sadistic men calling themselves leaders today. But some of these men are the enemies of your enemies. And while the biggest arms dealer in the world is your boss - the President of the United States, who ships more merchandise in a day than I do in a year - sometimes it's embarrassing to have his fingerprints on the guns. Sometimes he needs a freelancer like me to supply forces he can't be seen supplying. So, you call me evil, but unfortunately for you, I'm a necessary evil.” - Yuri

**Issue #1: Bribery**

Ava, who is Yuri’s wife, confronts him about his business (who she learns of from Valentine). Yuri promises to stop gun running, and makes an attempt of supporting his family by taking a more legal and honest job. Shortly after, Baptiste and his son make a surprise visit to Yuri’s home in the United States, in order to acquire more weapon supplies. Yuri struggles to
clarify to them that he is legitimate now, but he complies with their wishes when Baptiste hands him over an extremely large blood diamond.

As I have mentioned previously, none of the issues within this movie were ever resolved. How it should have been resolved though, in my opinion, is simply turning down all means of business with them, along with anyone who was involved in the gun smuggling business. The expense of losing my family would have been far more significant than having a diamond in my possession, no matter what the size. If the only way to remove myself fully from this type of situation meant moving and changing identity, then so be it.

**Issue #2: Deception**

> "Some of the most successful relationships are based on lies and deceit. Since that's where they usually end up anyway; it's a logical place to start". - Yuri

Our first encounter of dishonesty in the movie (besides the family lying about being Jewish immigrants) is when Yuri is on the ship *Kristol* smuggling a shipment of weapons. He (Yuri) receives a call stating that the authorities have been “tipped off”. In order to delude the authorities Yuri is immediately (literally, within minutes) forced to have the name of the ship changed to the Kono (a man paints over the name Kristol and repaints in its place Kono), along with removing all evidence that the ship is the Kristol. Obviously it all pans out in Yuri’s favor, as it is just the beginning of the movie; however, we (the audience) learn from this situation that Yuri is indeed an extremely intelligent, yet deceiving individual.

Yuri also obtains, and keeps, his multiple identities and paperwork in a secured storage unit (which later his wife discovers). He (Yuri) makes the statement that he goes through a lot of trouble to try and make his business seem legitimate; whether that is through phony paperwork (or any paperwork for that matter) along with having money advanced to offshore accounts.
Ethically speaking, Yuri should have never become involved in this type of business in the first place. It is hard to determine how I would have reacted if I were in Yuri’s position. Obviously, I would have to be a very deceiving individual who stands with no principles; if that was the case, then I would have reacted the same way. However, I am not, which brings me right back to what I stated in the first place; I would not have been involved in any business of this sort, period. Yuri is, in no doubt, very good at what he does. Even when his wife confronts him of what she has discovered he explains that “it’s not about the money”; he continues to smuggle in weapons because “he’s good at it”. However, is that a viable justification to continue down the same self destructive path; I don’t believe so.

**Issue #3: Power and Exploitation**

"You know you can make this stop whenever you want, all you have to say is stop" - Yuri

We are shown the true character of Yuri in a pivotal scene which demonstrates the relationship between Yuri and Baptiste. Yuri returns to his hotel room, in Africa, and is surprised when he sees Simeon Weisz tied to a chair and gagged. Baptiste is there, along with some other men, and explains to Yuri that Simeon was trying to take Yuri’s business away from him (that business being Baptiste). Baptiste places a gun in Yuri's hand, but Yuri says that he can’t shoot Simeon. Baptiste then places his hand on the gun, aims the gun at Simeon’s head, and announces that they will do it together. It is obvious that Yuri is hesitant with the notion of killing someone; it is then that (Baptiste) tells Yuri, “You know you can make this stop whenever you want, all you have to say is stop”. The scene ends with Baptiste pulling the trigger, as Yuri looks away.

I interpreted this scene as being an important part of the movie. The audience has been exposed to the insensitivity of Yuri throughout the movie, but in this instance we are shown the defenselessness of him. There was one scene in particular where his brother, Vitaly, witnesses a
group of men chase down and kill a woman and her child with machetes. Vitaly goes to Yuri, clearly distressed (for good reason), and tells his brother that they can’t go through with the deal. Vitaly states, “If you hand over those guns, those people are going to die”. Yuri finds nothing disturbing with this, and tells Vitaly “It’s none of our business, this is not our war. If I don’t sell them (Baptiste and his son) these guns then someone else will. People are still going to get shot, but the money goes into another person's pockets. I really like money going into my pockets instead.” Yuri sees himself as not being responsible for people’s death because he isn’t the one who pulls the trigger, yet he never denies being a death merchant. Either way, when his finger was on the trigger he became the one responsible, and he yet he feels no shame.

This issue was never resolved; Yuri used his power, and those of others, to continue his business, he exploited warring nations, and was responsible for the deaths of many people. Yuri should have used his influence and intelligence to assist in building communities, instead of aiding in destroying them. I know if I was put in that sort of situation, and had the power which Yuri had, I would refuse to go through with the deal and instead use my awareness to make sure these people would be penalized for their actions.

**Other Issues:**

As mentioned before, there were a lot of ethical issues within this movie. As far as Marketing ethics go though; it was the three which I have just discussed, those being: bribery, deceit, and power and exploitation.
Overall, I have learned by completing this exercise how to become more aware of ethical situations that are brought up in a movie, or any situation for that matter, and how to rationalize and interpret my thoughts. This exercise has also made me think of how I would react in certain situations, which in this case, was not as challenging since any ordinary individual would find this type of business to be completely unethical.