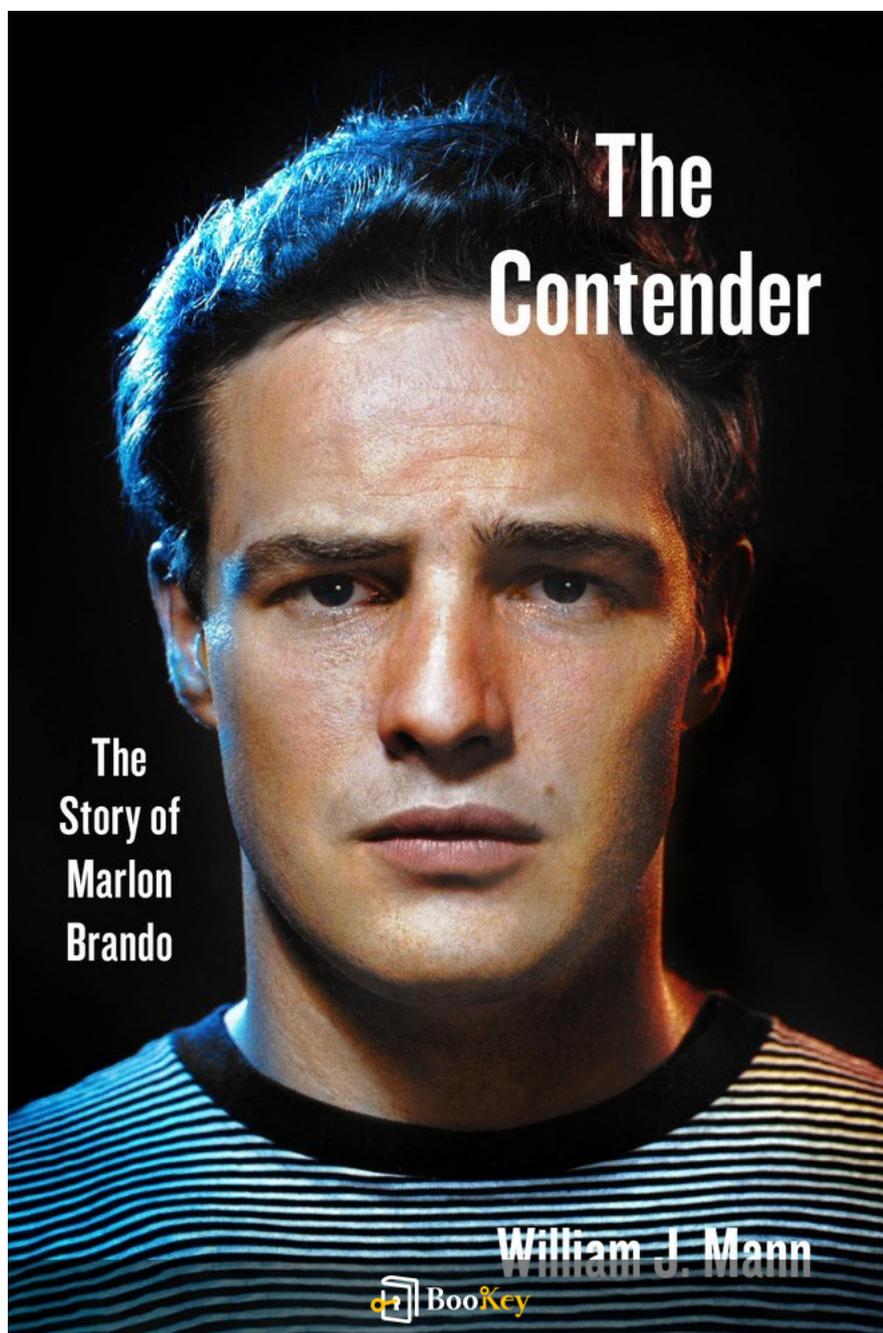


# The Contender PDF (Limited Copy)

William J. Mann



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# **The Contender Summary**

Exploring the Complex Legacy of Marlon Brando

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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## About the book

In "The Contender," biographer William J. Mann offers an in-depth exploration of Marlon Brando, a transformative figure in 20th-century cinema, known for his groundbreaking performances and complex persona. Drawing from newly accessed materials from Brando's private archives, Mann meticulously chronicles Brando's journey both as an artist and a person.

The narrative begins by establishing Brando's early life, highlighting his tumultuous childhood and the experiences that shaped his identity. As a prodigious talent, Brando emerged on the theater scene with roles that showcased his raw emotionality and innovative techniques, ultimately redefining acting standards. His performances in iconic films such as "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "On the Waterfront" not only garnered critical acclaim but also established him as a cultural icon who challenged traditional notions of masculinity and sexuality.

Mann delves into Brando's tumultuous personal life, including his struggles with fame, relationships, and inner demons. The biography reveals how these personal challenges were intertwined with his artistry, enhancing the authenticity and depth of his performances. Furthermore, Brando's commitment to social justice is important to understanding his legacy. He became an outspoken advocate for civil rights, using his influence to

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challenge systemic racism and advocate for marginalized communities, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

"The Contender" intricately weaves together Brando's personal battles and his profound impact on American culture, presenting a multifaceted portrait of a man who was both a revolutionary actor and a deeply flawed individual. With sixteen pages of evocative photographs, Mann's work serves as an essential resource for anyone seeking to grasp the enduring legacy of Marlon Brando as a cultural titan whose influence continues to resonate.

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## About the author

William J. Mann's chapters often weave intricate narratives filled with well-rounded characters and captivating plots. In his acclaimed novel "The Contender," readers are introduced to a diverse cast, each contributing to the overarching themes of resilience and personal growth. The story revolves around a central character facing significant challenges—both internal and external—that test their determination and spirit.

As the plot unfolds, the protagonist encounters a mentor-like figure, guiding them through their struggles. This character imparts wisdom and encourages the protagonist to embrace their identity and pursue their dreams. The dynamic between the two reveals the importance of mentorship and support in overcoming obstacles, a recurring theme throughout the narrative.

Alongside these personal battles, Mann delves into broader societal issues that mirror the protagonist's journey. These contextual elements enrich the story, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the challenges faced in the quest for success and acceptance.

As new characters are introduced, each adds layers of complexity and depth. For instance, a rival might embody the fears and insecurities the protagonist grapples with, while a friend serves as a steadfast ally, highlighting the value of camaraderie. These relationships not only drive the plot forward but also

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invite readers to reflect on their own experiences and the importance of community.

Mann's skillful storytelling is further enhanced by his ability to craft vivid settings, transporting readers into the heart of the characters' environments, whether it's the roaring crowds of a boxing arena or the quiet moments of introspection in a dimly lit room. This immersive quality draws readers deeper into the emotional landscape of the story.

Throughout the chapters, Mann navigates the protagonist's evolution, skillfully intertwining moments of triumph and despair. Ultimately, "The Contender" serves as a powerful exploration of what it means to fight for one's dreams, emphasizing the universal nature of struggle and the transformative power of resilience. Each chapter builds upon the last, leading to a climactic resolution that underscores the protagonist's journey toward self-acceptance and fulfillment.

In summary, Mann's work exemplifies the blend of rich character exploration, thematic depth, and engaging storytelling, making "The Contender" a compelling read that resonates with audiences across different backgrounds.

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# Chapter 1 Summary: Prologue: The Man on the Witness Stand

## Prologue Summary

In the bustling courthouse of Santa Monica, California, the testimony of Marlon Brando, Jr. takes center stage as he prepares to address the manslaughter charge stemming from his son Christian's fatal shooting of Dag Drollet. Weighing over 300 pounds, Brando's presence is imposing as he chooses to swear on his family rather than invoke God, illustrating the deeply personal stakes at play. This moment is a profound reflection of Brando's complicated life, marked by a challenging Midwestern upbringing and his ascendance to Hollywood stardom.

The backdrop of the case reveals a tumultuous family drama. Christian Brando shot Drollet following allegations of abuse against his sister, Cheyenne, who was pregnant at the time. The ensuing trial, characterized by sensational media coverage, culminated in Christian pleading guilty to voluntary manslaughter, spotlighting the Brando family's public tribulations and the burdens of celebrity.

As he reflects on his life while on the witness stand, Brando grapples with feelings of failure as a father and his sense of a "wasted life." Despite his

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revolutionary contributions to acting, he is haunted by regrets, as the tension between his celebrated public persona and profound personal anguish becomes painfully evident. Brando's artistic legacy, while groundbreaking, is marred by his persistent struggles in both his career and family dynamics.

Throughout his life, Brando has battled against racism and social injustices, often becoming a target of media scrutiny. His experiences during his son's trial serve as a microcosm of broader societal discussions surrounding race and the American justice system, highlighting the intersection of fame and activism.

Later in his career, particularly post-1960s, Brando's focus shifted from performing to engaging in political and social causes, which he saw as more meaningful than the self-indulgence of Hollywood. His growing discontent with the film industry's commercialism led him to search for a deeper purpose and to advocate for social justice.

The narrative urges readers to reassess Brando's life and work beyond conventional portrayals. It delves into his feelings of disillusionment with fame, the emotional wounds inflicted by his childhood, and the persistent quest for authentic connections and significance throughout his turbulent existence.

Ultimately, this prologue lays the groundwork for a comprehensive

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exploration of Marlon Brando's multifaceted identity as both a cinematic icon and an individual wrestling with personal tragedies, encouraging a nuanced understanding of his legacy that encompasses both his achievements and struggles.

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# Chapter 2 Summary: An Imaginative Young Man

## Summary of "An Imaginative Young Man"

### Summer 1943

In the vibrant yet tumultuous surroundings of Greenwich Village, Bud, a young man disqualified from military service due to being classified 4-F, grapples with a mix of angst and excitement. Drawn to the frenetic energy of New York City, particularly Times Square, he observes the diverse personalities around him while wrestling with his own violent temper. Despite feeling guilt about escaping conscription, Bud finds solace in pursuing his passion for acting, enrolling in the Dramatic Workshop at the New School for Social Research on the encouragement of his sister. This choice symbolizes his yearning for freedom and self-expression.

### October 4

As autumn settles in, the desolate mood of wartime Manhattan conflicts with Bud's aspirations. Nostalgic for his simpler days digging ditches in Libertyville, he faces an identity crisis exacerbated by his unfitness for military service and indifference to the ongoing war. Once a promising student, he is now adrift, searching for purpose within the performing arts

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while combating a growing sense of inadequacy.

## **The Workshop Experience**

Entering the New School, Bud feels out of place among his privileged classmates, which intensifies his insecurities regarding his educational background. Discussions about theater and literature heighten his feelings of alienation. However, mentorship from inspiring figures like Erwin Piscator, who promotes an immersive approach to theater, contrasts sharply with other instructors' theories, notably Stella Adler's, establishing a rich but challenging learning environment.

## **Interactions with Classmates and Friends**

As Bud navigates complex relationships with female classmates, including his formal girlfriend Celia, he wrestles with his understanding of intimacy and commitment. His friendship with Darren Dublin, a charismatic peer, elevates his social stature, granting him a sense of acceptance amidst the chaos of his life and studies.

## **Winter 1943**

As winter approaches, Bud's emotional landscape darkens, burdened by his past experiences and burgeoning self-doubt. His participation in plays like

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"Hannele" marks a turning point; he begins to realize his potential as an actor, slowly rebuilding his self-esteem. These performances become conduits for self-discovery, offering him a glimpse of his capabilities despite personal struggles.

## **Spring 1944 and Notable Performances**

Bud's acting journey takes a positive turn in spring, as he successfully captivates audiences with performances in "Twelfth Night" and other plays. Praise for his natural ability to convey emotion cements his developing reputation in the theater world. Through supportive mentors, he learns valuable lessons about acting and personal growth, paving the way for a more certain future.

## **Emerging Opportunities and Challenges**

Although Bud's acclaim grows, his relationship with authority figures, particularly Piscator, becomes increasingly strained due to his rebellious tendencies. Leaving the Dramatic Workshop signifies a transitional phase for him, thrusting him into the broader world of acting where he must navigate the dualities of ambition and personal identity.

## **Continued Growth and Reflection**

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Throughout this tumultuous journey, Bud embraces his creative spirit, discovering a community among fellow actors. As he explores his talents further, he contemplates the repercussions of past decisions that have shaped his present. This chapter concludes with a reflective tone, capturing Bud's challenging yet transformative path toward self-discovery and fulfillment, ultimately setting the stage for his future both as an actor and an individual shaped by his experiences.

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## Chapter 3 Summary: The Hoodlum Aristocrat

### Chapter 3 Summary: The Hoodlum Aristocrat

The summer of 1947 in New York City is marked by the sweltering heat and the vibrant atmosphere of the theater world, particularly at the Liebling-Wood Agency. The agency is in a frenzy following the unexpected withdrawal of actor John Garfield from a Tennessee Williams play, prompting a fervent search for a suitable replacement. Amidst this chaotic backdrop, agent Bill Liebling is resolute in his desire to cast Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski, inspired by Brando's compelling performance in *\*Truckline Café\**.

However, Liebling's efforts to reach Brando prove challenging; the rising star has retreated from the spotlight, focusing instead on political activism. Brando is deeply engaged with the American League for a Free Palestine, advocating fervently for a Jewish state. This commitment to social justice reflects Brando's belief that his role as an artist extends beyond mere entertainment. His experiences during this activism profoundly shape his outlook on life, aligning him with broader themes of injustice and the human condition.

Simultaneously, American theater is experiencing a renaissance, with writers

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like Williams and Arthur Miller pushing the boundaries of realism and psychological depth in their work, marking a significant shift away from the melodramatic styles of earlier years. As the search for Brando continues, he eventually agrees to audition for Williams in the artistic enclave of Provincetown, driven partly by financial necessity and a sense of duty to support his family.

During the audition, Brando's talent shines, capturing the attention of both Williams and noted director Elia Kazan, who immediately sees him as the quintessential Stanley. Once rehearsals begin, Kazan adopts an innovative approach focused on collaboration and spontaneity, which aligns well with Brando's naturalistic acting style. Brando's portrayal of Stanley is layered and complex, reflecting not only the character's raw energy but also his own personal struggles and insecurities.

As the production progresses, interpersonal tensions emerge, particularly between Brando and actress Jessica Tandy, who plays Blanche DuBois. Tandy's more structured approach clashes with Brando's improvisational style, yet despite these conflicts, Brando's performance captivates audiences, earning him acclaim during previews.

The excitement culminates with opening night in New York City, where the anticipation is palpable. Reviews are mixed, often highlighting Brando's performance while also noting that Tandy's portrayal frequently steals the

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spotlight. As *\*A Streetcar Named Desire\** begins to achieve significant success, Brando finds himself grappling with the dual nature of fame—experiencing both exhilaration and resentment toward the expectations that accompany it.

In reflection, Brando contemplates the overwhelming significance of his performance and the profound transformation in his life. Caught between the desire for recognition and his inherent insecurities, Brando's journey through the tumult of newfound stardom reveals an artist wrestling with his identity amidst the pressures of public acclaim. This chapter artfully illustrates the complexity of an artist's life, marked by personal demons, professional aspirations, and the quest for authenticity in a rapidly changing world.

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# Chapter 4: The American Hamlet

## Chapter 4 Summary: The American Hamlet

### Winter in Hoboken

In January 1954, the frigid winter weather of Hoboken became a backdrop for the film production of "On the Waterfront," directed by Elia Kazan. The harsh conditions were viewed favorably by Kazan, believing they enhanced the actors' portrayals of working-class longshoremen, a central theme co-developed with screenwriter Budd Schulberg.

### Marlon Brando's Struggles

At the age of thirty, Marlon Brando found himself grappling with the challenges that accompanied his burgeoning fame. Once carefree, he now felt the weight of public scrutiny, relying on the goodwill of others even for basic needs like subway fare. His ascent to stardom had dramatically altered his way of life, leading to feelings of vulnerability and a growing aversion to the celebrity lifestyle.

### Family Dynamics

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While Marlon's success provided his family with a comfortable lifestyle, it also complicated his relationships with them. He felt a persistent need to validate himself to his parents, especially to his mother, who visited him on set and left a profound impact on him and the film crew alike. This desire to demonstrate his worth often clashed with his complicated feelings about his past.

## **Competition and Rivalry**

Amid the fierce competition that defined Hollywood, Marlon was acutely aware of his place among contemporaries such as Montgomery Clift. Critically, he faced regular comparisons with Clift, which stoked his early ambition. However, as fame settled in, the relentless media attention became a burden, often overshadowing his achievements.

## **Pressure to Conform**

Caught in a tug-of-war between personal freedom and Hollywood's societal expectations, Marlon struggled with feelings of inadequacy and the pressure to conform to industry standards. This internal conflict affected his relationships, leading him to seek escapism through fleeting affairs. Yet, he yearned for deeper connections, often sabotaging his own desires through fear of vulnerability.

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## **Emotional Breakdown**

As the pressures of fame mounted, compounded by his parents' visit and his tumultuous relationships with women, including Ellen and Celia, Marlon experienced an emotional breakdown. His distress deepened following the loss of his mother to illness, spawning panic attacks and intense anxiety. The relentless demands of Hollywood only exacerbated his turmoil, despite his desire to remain relevant.

## **Career Reflections and Changes**

Marlon found himself compromising in his career, accepting smaller roles like in "Désirée," reflecting his ongoing struggle between loyalty to his craft and family obligations. Despite earning critical acclaim, he faced significant personal conflict stemming from the dissonance between his self-image and external expectations.

## **Conclusion**

With the premiere of "On the Waterfront," Marlon was catapulted back into the limelight, receiving widespread acclaim for his performance. While this success marked a significant turning point after years of hardship, Marlon remained haunted by unresolved questions about his identity, the expectations of his family, and the pursuit of personal fulfillment amidst the

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trappings of Hollywood stardom.

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# Chapter 5 Summary: The Rabble-Rouser

## Chapter 5 Summary: The Rabble-Rouser

### Setting and Background

On May 1, 1960, Marlon Brando, alongside his friend Professor Eugene "Bud" Burdick, arrives at San Quentin Prison, where a spirited protest against the impending execution of convicted rapist Caryl Chessman is underway. This demonstration not only champions Chessman's life but also ignites a larger conversation about capital punishment and justice in America.

### Marlon's Resolve

Moved by the palpable solidarity of the protesters, Marlon gears up to address the crowd, reflecting on his resolve to leverage his Hollywood fame for social change. He announces his intention to produce a film about Chessman, pledging that all profits will support efforts against the death penalty, thereby underscoring his commitment to activism.

### Chessman's Conviction

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Caryl Chessman has spent over a decade on death row under contentious circumstances, his execution looming despite numerous appeals for clemency from various advocates, including Brando. The complexities of Chessman's case mirror the broader national discourse on capital punishment, raising profound questions regarding morality, justice, and the value of human life.

### **Marlon's Duality**

Within the confines of his celebrity status, Marlon battles personal dissatisfaction and the psychological toll of his Hollywood career. Disenchanted with conventional roles, he experiences a stirring desire to engage in meaningful activism. His tumultuous romantic history reveals patterns of emotional detachment and self-sabotage, further complicating his quest for fulfillment.

### **Shift in Focus**

Following Chessman's execution, Marlon recognizes an urgent need to realign his artistic endeavors with his political beliefs, steering away from purely commercial films. This realization intensifies his commitment to activism, leading him to seek projects that offer profound social commentary.

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## **Personal Challenges**

As Marlon pursues his ambition for meaningful work, he contends with significant personal challenges, including bitter custody disputes with his ex-wife, Anna Kashfi, and the emotional fallout from previous relationships. This chapter captures the tension between his public persona and private dilemmas, as relentless media scrutiny often exacerbates his struggles.

## **Struggle for Identity and Peace**

Marlon's journey is characterized by an exploration of fame, success, and his inherent values. He seeks to forge deeper connections with his children while navigating tumultuous relationships with women. Through his activism, he begins to redefine his identity, challenging both his own perceptions and societal expectations of celebrity responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 5 delves into Marlon Brando's profound internal and external conflicts as he strives to reconcile his dual roles as an artist and activist amid the escalating social changes of the 1960s. His narrative is emblematic of the cultural shifts around civil rights and capital punishment, and it raises pivotal questions about Hollywood's responsibility in addressing critical societal issues.

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# Chapter 6 Summary: A Family Man

## Chapter 6 Summary: A Family Man

In the fall of 1970, Marlon Brando finds himself at a crossroads. Once a titan of Hollywood, he now grapples with a deep disillusionment regarding his career and the world around him. Despite pressure from his devoted assistant, Alice, to read "The Godfather," Brando resists, feeling a bitter discontent due to a decade-long drought in successful film roles. The weight of societal upheaval—the assassinations of iconic leaders and political unrest—fuels his despair, leaving him unsure of his place in an increasingly volatile America.

Amid these struggles, Marlon reflects on his failed projects like "The Arrangement," which fell short due to his wavering motivation and personal demons. Wandering the grounds of his home, he grapples with his longing for a comeback, not just for financial stability but for the validation that success brings. Eventually, his curiosity leads him to the pages of "The Godfather," where he discovers a compelling connection to the character of Don Vito Corleone. Seeing reflections of corporate America within the mafia family's intricate dynamics ignites a spark within him.

As he collaborates with director Francis Ford Coppola, a renewed sense of

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purpose emerges. Coppola's respect for Brando's artistic process enhances their creative synergy, resulting in moments of improvisation that showcase Brando's acting genius. This revitalization of his craft breathes life into his outlook, evident in his performance.

However, despite the resurgence of his professional life, personal challenges loom large. His relationship with his son Christian is strained, marked by conflict and emotional turmoil—symbolized by Christian's departure due to issues with his mother. This adds another layer to Brando's complexities as a father, emphasizing the difficulties of balancing his career with familial responsibilities.

The chapter crescendos at the Academy Awards, where Brando's refusal to accept the Best Actor Oscar stirs controversy. By sending Native American activist Sacheen Littlefeather to address the audience, he draws attention to the injustices faced by American Indians, showcasing his commitment to social issues and inciting mixed reactions within the media and Hollywood.

While Brando's struggles with substance abuse—particularly with Valium—persist, he maintains a tender yet tumultuous relationship with Jill, highlighting his ongoing battle with mental health. The chapter closes with a poignant moment spent with his son, reflective of his desire for stability and connection within his family.

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As Marlon prepares for an exciting new project with acclaimed director Bernardo Bertolucci, he stands at the intersection of expectation and personal commitment. This chapter encapsulates Brando's tumultuous journey, illustrating a man striving for identity, reconciliation, and fulfillment amid the challenges of fame and familial obligation.

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# Chapter 7 Summary: Epilogue: The Bard of the Hollywood Hills

## Epilogue of "The Contender"

### Introduction: Marlon's Future Reflection

In the epilogue, Marlon Brando reflects on the unpredictable nature of life, grappling with the weight of past decisions, especially as they affect his family. He is particularly haunted by the incarceration of his son, Christian, for manslaughter, which highlights his failed attempts at responsible parenting and his struggle to overcome his personal demons.

### Courtroom Sentencing

In a poignant courtroom scene from 1991, Christian Brando receives a ten-year prison sentence. This moment is a painful reminder for Marlon of the deep impact his celebrity status has had on his family, instilling a sense of guilt and despair within him. The public scrutiny surrounding his family has intertwined with their personal struggles, transforming Marlon's life into a trial of its own.

### Marlon's Personal Struggles

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Marlon wrestles with feelings of self-recrimination stemming from a series of personal tragedies. His tumultuous relationships and the emotional toll of his parenting choices—particularly concerning his sons, Christian and Cheyenne—prove challenging. His efforts to mend fractured family ties are met with emotional strain, revealing the complexity of his path towards redemption.

### **A Life of Loss and Regret**

Marlon's life is marked by profound loss, including the death of his long-time partner, Jill, and his daughter Cheyenne's struggles with mental health, culminating in her tragic suicide. These events contribute to his pervasive sense of failure as a parent, despite his intentions to offer a better life to his children.

### **Spiritual Journey and Coping Mechanisms**

In his later years, Marlon seeks solace through meditation and artistic expression to cope with grief and declining health. This exploration of spirituality reflects his desire for authenticity and peace, distancing himself from the chaos of Hollywood and showcasing a quest for deeper meaning.

### **Decline and Reflections on Fame**

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As Marlon confronts his declining health, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the world of fame and the entertainment industry. His reflections reveal a longing for authenticity, highlighting a sadness over the superficial nature of celebrity culture that has consumed him.

## **Legacy and Influence**

Marlon emerges as a multifaceted figure—both a misunderstood genius and a flawed individual—who significantly impacted acting and social justice. Despite the profound tragedies in his life, his legacy is one of defiance against the triviality of fame, as he sought greater significance in his work and personal endeavors.

## **Final Years and Legacy**

In his final days, Marlon's thoughts expand to address global issues, showing concern for climate change and social justice. His death in 2004 marks the conclusion of a tumultuous yet impactful life, leaving behind a legacy of artistic innovation intertwined with a complex, often painful personal history.

## **Conclusion**

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Marlon Brando's journey is emblematic of the tension between celebrity and personal authenticity. His life exemplifies a relentless pursuit of truth and justice amid the chaos of personal and familial struggles, rendering him a lasting figure in both the realms of art and social discourse.

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