



WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

# Fallen Angels

## (Do lok tin si)

Initially developed as part of *Chungking Express*, *Fallen Angels* shares a similar freewheeling spirit but it's a much darker and moodier affair, exploring the nocturnal lives of assassins, femme fatales and mute ex-cons. Shot with frenetic verve by Wong's frequent cinematographer Christopher Doyle, it's a stylish drama laced with quirky humour that glimmers with the neon magic of Hong Kong at night.

[bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

Not exactly a sequel to *Chungking Express*, although it contains many playful references back to the earlier film and one sublime moment when Takeshi Kaneshiro parodies Faye Wong's body language behind the Midnight Express snack counter, *Fallen Angels* offers a significantly darker account of what it takes to make it through the Hong Kong night. All five central characters (four of them with copious voice-overs in the trademark Wong Kar Wai style) are desperately lonely and on the edge of hysteria. The men are taciturn, prone to violence and emotionally blocked. The women are noisy, emotionally voluble and obsessive. But all of them are deeply solipsistic, and their moments of togetherness are hesitant and fugitive.

Partly because the two strands of narrative are loosely interwoven and partly because the film is shot and cut with such brio, *Fallen Angels* is hard to take in the first time around. It complicates matters that the story of the hitman and his lovelorn agent is moody, neo-noir drama while the story of He Zhiwu's nocturnal exploits is farcical and often riotously funny; few films have ever dared to change tone from scene to scene with so little regard for the viewer's ability to keep up. Repeat viewings clarify not only the twists and turns of the plotting, but also finesse the underlying logic of the film's structure. Scenes turn out to be linked as much by the rhythms of movement and by colour as by theme or motif; what starts out looking like a patchwork turns out to be a fauvist mosaic.

The elaboration of the characters and concerns could hardly be more concise. The first shot, for example, shows the first ever meeting between the killer and his agent, and their conversation cuts to the quick of their professional relationship: 'Are we still partners? – We've been partners for 155 weeks. But partners should never become emotionally involved.' At the same time, the visual distortion of the image (it was shot through an ultra-wide-angle lens, which distends the space between the two characters) announces the way the whole film will be shot. And the image is in monochrome, which is the film's convention for marking the isolated moments of truth between the characters. Wong Kar Wai maintains this density of dramatic and stylistic attack with a barrage of visual, verbal and musical information. We know from British press reactions to *Chungking Express* that this style of filmmaking is incomprehensible and/or inconsequential to our 'senior' critics; others, however, find it wildly exhilarating.

It's the sheer density of the film's address that takes it a step beyond *Days of Being Wild*, *Ashes of Time* and *Chungking Express*. The offhand wit familiar from the earlier films is still plentiful. But the resonances of the jokes are often quite melancholy; as is the fact that the hitman's instructions to carry out a killing are coded as messages to meet friends. Loneliness is ultimately the film's centrifugal force. It coalesces in the anguished images of the agent masturbating to assuage her longings for the hitman. Balancing these are moments of intense joy, the most spectacular being Baby's brazen pick-up of the hitman and He Zhiwu's videotaping of his father.

The overall sense of the coexistence of pain and pleasure, anomie and elation, is new in Wong Kar Wai's work. The central ambivalences are rooted in the film language: the wide-angle distortions of Chris Doyle's virtuoso cinematography create an effect of distance-in-proximity, while William Chang's intricate montages never shy away from visual and tonal mismatches. The same ambivalence informs the voice-overs, which address the audience with the kind of easy intimacy that the characters fail to achieve with each other. Hence the disturbing ever-present sense that each emotion and each passing thought can be flipped to reveal its opposite.

*Fallen Angels* finesses these complexities in a world which bears exactly the same relation to the Hong Kong of 1995 as *Alphaville* did to the Paris of 1965. If the film misses greatness, it's partly because of weak casting: neither Leon Lai nor Michele Reis comes alive on screen, although Takeshi Kaneshiro and Charlie Young are impossibly wonderful, and Karen Mok will probably find 'Baby' as hard to shake off as Tony Perkins found Norman Bates. The bottom line is that *Fallen Angels* takes every risk known to filmmaking, and succeeds triumphantly a whole lot more often than it fails.

**Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, September 1996**

This spiritual companion to *Chungking Express* feels like a seedier version of that film's freewheeling observation of lovesick, wayward souls. Another flirtation with Hong Kong genre cinema, *Fallen Angels* is something like his John Woo movie, a gangster film concerned with the city's lonely weirdos, chief among them a hitman who begins to have second thoughts about his job.

Unlike the idealistic, escapist dreaming of the *Chungking Express* soundtrack, *Fallen Angels* is more interested in ethereal pieces, such as Laurie Anderson's 'Speak My Language', a moody track speaking of the living and the dead, which plays in full over abstract imagery. Along with Shirley Kwan's 'Wang Ji Ta', these tracks emphasise the bleak circumstances of the characters, who seem more like spectres haunting the city than people with lives of their own.

Closing out the film is The Flying Pickets' 'Only You', perhaps the only track to express hopefulness, as two lovelorn characters find a chance to escape from the film's seemingly perpetual night.

**Kambole Campbell, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk), 20 February 2021**

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## FALLEN ANGELS (DO LOK TIN SI)

*Director:* Wong Kar Wai  
*Production Company:* Jet Tone Production  
*A Presentation by:* Chan Ye-Cheng  
*Executive Producer:* Wong Kar Wai  
*Producer:* Jeff Lau Chun-Wai  
*Line Producer/Production Manager:* Jacky Pang Yee-Wah  
*Associate Producer:* Norman Law  
*Executive Production Manager:* Carly Wong  
*Assistant Production Manager:* Agnes Leung  
*Assistant Director:* Johnnie Kwong  
*Screenplay:* Wong Kar Wai  
*Director of Photography:* Christopher Doyle  
*2nd Unit Camera:* Mark Li P'ing-Pin, Joe Chan Gong-Hung  
*Lighting:* Wong Chi-Ming  
*Lighting Assistants:* Li Yahui, Guan Yongxiang  
*2nd Unit Camera Assistants:* He Baorong, Jeng Jingzhong  
*Editors:* William Chang Suk-Ping, Wong Ming-Lam  
*Assistant Editor:* Zeng Zewen  
*Art Director:* William Chang Suk-Ping  
*Assistant Art Director:* Wen Nianzhong  
*Props:* Tan Yongchang  
*Wardrobe Assistant:* Tian Zhibin  
*Make-up:* Kwan Lee-Na  
*Hair:* Wu Xuhao  
*Music:* Frankie Chan Fan-Kei, Roel A. Garcia  
*African Vocal:* Robison Randriaharimalala

*Sound Recording:* Leung Tat  
*Sound Mixer:* Raymond Mak  
*Assistant Sound Recording:* Li Xingqiang  
*Sound Effects:* Ching Siu-Lung  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Poon Kin-Kwan

### Cast

Leon Lai Ming (*Wong Chi-Ming, the killer*)  
Michèle Reis (*the killer's agent*)  
Kaneshiro Takeshi (*He Zhiwu*)  
Charlie Young (*Charlie Young*)  
Karen Mok Man-Wai (*Baby*)  
Chan Fai-Hung (*the man forced to eat ice-cream*)  
Chen Wanlei (*He Zhiwu's father*)  
Toru Saito (*Sato, the sushi restaurant manager*)  
Kong To-Hoi (*Ah-Hoi, the killer's childhood classmate*)  
Kwan Lee-Na (*the woman pressed to buy vegetables*)  
Wu Yuk-Ho (*the man forced to have his clothes washed*)

Hong Kong 1995©  
96 mins

This 4K digital restoration was undertaken from the 35mm original camera negative by the Criterion Collection in collaboration with L'Imagine Ritrovata, Jet Tone and One Cool. It was supervised and approved by Wong Kar Wai.

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## WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

### As Tears Go By (Wong Gok ka moon)

Wed 7 Jul 14:30; Sat 17 Jul 20:30; Mon 19 Jul 20:45

### Days of Being Wild (Ah Fei jing juen)

Thu 8 Jul 20:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Ann Lee);  
Mon 12 Jul 14:30; Mon 19 Jul 18:00

### Fallen Angels (Do lok tin si)

Fri 9 Jul 20:50; Wed 14 Jul 14:30; Sun 25 Jul 18:30

### Ashes of Time Redux (Dung che sai duk)

Sat 10 Jul 11:20 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Ann Lee);  
Wed 21 Jul 20:45; Fri 30 Jul 20:45

### Chungking Express (Chung Hing sam lam)

Sat 10 Jul 18:15; Mon 12 Jul 20:50;  
Tue 20 Jul 20:45; Thu 29 Jul 14:30

### Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)

Sun 11 Jul 15:40; Fri 16 Jul 14:30; Fri 23 Jul 18:10

### In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)

Wed 14 Jul 20:45; Sat 17 Jul 13:30;  
Wed 21 Jul 14:30; Thu 29 Jul 20:45

### 2046

Thu 15 Jul 20:20; Sat 17 Jul 16:10; Sat 31 Jul 14:30

### The Grandmaster (Yi dai zong shi)

Tue 20 Jul 18:00; Thu 22 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 20:50

### The Hand (Extended Cut)

Thu 22 Jul 18:30; Fri 30 Jul 18:20

### My Blueberry Nights

Fri 23 Jul 20:50; Wed 28 Jul 20:40

Presented in partnership with Janus Films and the ICA

Visit [Youtube.com/bfi](https://www.youtube.com/bfi) for a dizzying tour in the World of Wong Kar Wai, guided by season programmer Ann Lee

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## CHINESE VISUAL FESTIVAL

### Opening Night: UK Premiere: Drifting + intro

Thu 15 Jul 17:50

### UK Premiere: Love Poem + intro

Sat 17 Jul 12:00

### Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue + intro

Sat 24 Jul 14:00

### Closing Night: UK Premiere: Shadows + intro

Sun 25 Jul 15:10

## NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

### After Love

Continues from Jun

### Nashville

Continues from Jun

### The Father

Continues from Jun

### Ultraviolence

Continues from Jun

### Supernova

From Fri 2 Jul

### Another Round

From Fri 9 Jul

### Jumbo

From Fri 9 Jul

### Deerskin

From Fri 16 Jul

### Girlfriends

From Fri 23 Jul

### Mandabi

From Fri 23 Jul

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