



WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

To Die For

+ intro by Hannah Strong

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Nicole Kidman plays Suzanne not merely as a bimbo, but as a woman who has concentrated down to one obsessively narrow focus, leaving herself brain-and-heart-dead outside it. At one point, as Larry talks to her about having kids, her subjective angle shot of him shrinks to a tight circle around his head – expressive both of the gun she plans to have aimed at him, and of her tunnel-vision.

Kidman's exactly gauged – and very funny – performance is matched by those of her co-actors, none of whom is allowed to go over the top. Matt Dillon works a sympathetic variation on his preening grunge-rocker from *Singles*, genuinely touching in his starry-eyed inability to recognise the monster he is married to. There's a fine display of caustic disbelief from Illeana Douglas as his sister Janice, and an unbilled George Segal puts in a creepily avuncular appearance as a predatory television executive. As Lydia, the student least likely to, Alison Folland makes an impressive screen debut: graceless, lumpy, her mouth permanently adroop, she trots round after Suzanne in doggy devotion, seeing everything and understanding nothing.

Much of *To Die For's* mordant wit derives from its fluent editing, deftly juxtaposing the various displaced narratives – voice-over, screen interview, reported speech – with the deglamorised reality. 'It was the most exciting time of my life,' Lydia's voice over tells us, as we see her drearily minding Suzanne's lapdog while Suzanne and Jimmy are exercising the bedsprings. As Larry begs abjectly for his life before being blown away, the scene is intercut with Suzanne on television, concluding her usual weather report with a fulsome 'special greeting to my husband', having chosen their first wedding anniversary for his death date.

These gags, glittering black comedy in themselves, are also intrinsic to the film's theme – that television, far from offering access to some inner truth, as Suzanne believes, distorts and devalues, sacrificing insight to facile celebrity. Even the most unpromising material can be turned to account. At the end of the film, with Suzanne dead, Lydia of all people is groomed for telestardom. As we watch, her image quadruples and finally fills the screen in multiple postage-stamp reproduction. Meanwhile Suzanne gazes sightlessly out through the ice – preserved, as she always wished, in frozen perfection behind a transparent screen.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, November 1995

TO DIE FOR

Directed by: Gus Van Sant
©: Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.
Presented by: Columbia Pictures, Rank Film Distributors
Executive Producers: Jonathan Taplin, Joseph M. Caracciolo
Produced by: Laura Ziskin
Co-producers: Sandy Isaac, Leslie Morgan
Unit Production Manager: Steven J.D. Wakefield
Production Co-ordinator: Regina Robb
Production Accountant: Carole A. Wattles
Location Manager: Gordon Yang
Production Secretary: Shauna Jamison
1st Assistant Director: David Webb
Script Supervisor: Kathryn Buck
Casting by: Howard Feuer
Screenplay by: Buck Henry
Based on the book by: Joyce Maynard
Director of Photography: Eric Alan Edwards
Camera Operator: Perry Hoffmann
1st Assistant Camera: Michael Hall
2nd Assistant Camera: Kevin Dutchak
Chief Lighting Technician: Steve Ferrier
Key Grip: Mark Manchester
Stills Photographer: Kerry Hayes
Special Effects: Laird McMurray Film Service
Death Sequence Eye Effects: Chel White
Edited by: Curtiss Clayton
Associate Editors: Amy E. Duddleston, Craig Hayes
Production Designer: Missy Stewart
Art Director: Vlasta Svoboda
Set Decorator: Carol A. Lavoie
Property Master: Ken Clark
Construction Co-ordinator: Henry Iloia
Costume Designer: Beatrix Aruna Pasztor
Wardrobe Supervisor: Delphine White
Make-up: Patricia Green
Hair Stylist: David R. Beecroft
Title Sequence by: Pablo Ferro
Titles/Opticals by: Cinema Research Corporation
Colour Timer: Gloria Kaiser
Music by: Danny Elfman
Orchestra Conducted by: Richard Stone
Orchestration: Edgardo Simone, Steve Bartek
Music Editor: Ellen Segal
Recorded/Mixed by: Robert Fernandez, Bill Jackson
Music Consultant: Jeffrey Pollack
Production Mixer: Owen Langevin
Boom Operators: Denis Bellingham, Jim Thompson
Re-recording Mixers: David Parker, Michael Semanick
Supervising Sound Editor: Kelley Baker
Sound Effects Editors: Peter Appleton, Mary Bauer, David Cohen
ADR by: Burton Sharp
Dialect Coach: Carla Meyer
Animal Trainers: Diane McWhinnie, Jacqueline Parkin
Unit Publicist: Amanda Brand

Cast

Nicole Kidman (*Suzanne Stone Maretto*)
Joaquin Phoenix (*Jimmy Emmett*)
Casey Affleck (*Russell Hines*)
Illeana Douglas (*Janice Maretto*)
Alison Folland (*Lydia Mertz*)
Dan Hedaya (*Joe Maretto*)
Wayne Knight (*Ed Grant*)
Kurtwood Smith (*Earl Stone*)
Holland Taylor (*Carol Stone*)
Maria Tucci (*Angela Maretto*)
Susan Traylor (*Faye Stone*)
Tim Hopper (*Mike Warden*)
Michael Rispoli (*Ben DeLuca*)
Matt Dillon (*Larry Maretto*)
Buck Henry (*Mr H. Finlaysson*)
Gerry Quigley (*George*)
Tom Forrester, Alan Edward Lewis (*fishermen*)
Nadine MacKinnon (*sexy woman*)
Conrad Coates (*weaselly guy*)
Ron Gabriel (*Sal*)
Ian Heath, Graeme Millington, Sean Ryan (*students*)
Nicholas Pasco (*detective*)
Joyce Maynard (*Suzanne's lawyer*)
David Collins, Eve Crawford, Janet Lo (*reporters*)
David Cronenberg (*man at lake*)
Tom Quinn (*skating promoter*)
Peter Glenn (*priest*)
Amber-Lee Campbell (*Suzanne aged 5*)
Colleen Williams (*Valerie Mertz*)
Simon Richards (*Chester*)
Philip Williams (*Babe Hines*)
Susan Backs (*June Hines*)
Kyra Harper (*Mary Emmett*)
Adam Roth (*band member*)
Andrew Scott (*band member*)
Tamara Gorski, Katie Griffin, Carla Renee (*girls at bar*)
Misha (*Walter the dog*)

USA/UK/Canada 1995
107 mins

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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