



TERROR VISION

Ms .45

After being sexually assaulted twice in one day, Thana, a non-speaking seamstress, is left terrified and traumatised. Arming herself with the .45 caliber pistol of her second attacker, Thana soon embarks on a killing spree in which no man is safe. To some this is a feminist cult classic, to others a seedy exploitation pic, but whatever your take, there's no denying this iconic rape-revenge shocker is a visceral, unforgettable piece of work.

Contains scenes of sexual assault that some viewers may find distressing.

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While it is undeniably true that the splatter/nasty genre, in its treatment of female flesh as meat to be carved, tends to exhibit a particularly unpleasant brand of sadistic sexism, the form does contain possibilities for militant feminism unmatched even by the likes of *A Question of Silence* or *Born in Flames*. In *I Spit on Your Grave*, the leader of a gang of degenerate rapists is allowed to express to the heroine the theory that, by wantonly displaying her body, she has 'asked for' her violation. His uncharacteristic intellectualising of the issue is immediately undercut by the most physical retort possible – the girl castrates him in the bath and leaves him bleeding to death. With *The Driller Killer*, his first feature, Abel Ferrara acknowledged the sexism of the splatter movie by explicitly avoiding it, presenting a psycho whose preferred victims were not desirable young women but undesirable old men. In *Ms .45* (a film whose very *title* has proved too much for many audiences), Ferrara, aided by the presence of the extraordinary Zoe Tamerlis, gives a rigorously feminist reading of the always problematic revenge-for-rape genre.

The film signals the seriousness with which it will tackle the subject in its treatment of the initial rapes. While the incidents are profoundly shocking, they horrify mainly because of their abruptness (at least in the currently available, slightly trimmed version) and the monstrosity of the performances. Ferrara, who appears as the first rapist under his Jimmy Laine pseudonym and pops up throughout the film in nightmare flashes as the incarnation of masculine evil, presents the two unconnected assailants as merely less restrained examples of the attitudes espoused, not only by the chattering street people who proposition every passing woman, but by the smooth-talking photographer, the paternally lecherous Albert, and the shoe salesman who proudly admits that he reacted to the discovery of his wife's bisexuality by strangling the cat. With such a relentless parade of unsympathetic male characters, the film has little need of explicit sexual violence to make its points. The complete absence of nudity, and the remarkably soft-pedalled violence, compare strikingly with *I Spit on Your Grave* – which drags out the rape sequence for over half its running time – or even with such mainstream, male-oriented versions of the same basic story as *Hannie Caulder*, *Death Weekend* and *Sudden Impact*.

A Polanski connection suggested by the decaying rabbit in *The Driller Killer* is furthered here by a few clutching hands and a body in the bath out of *Repulsion*, and by Tamerlis' resemblance to the Nastassia Kinski of *Tess*. However, while Polanski cannot refrain from making fetishes of his striking

heroines, Ferrara presents Tamerlis’ Thana as a neutral figure whose power over her victims derives from her ability to inspire and then contradict their fantasies of femininity. In the case of the shoe salesman, who pours out the story of his marriage to the mute girl in a bar, the moment of Thana’s failed attack on him coincides with his own dawning awareness of his shortcomings; hypnotised by her silent reproach, he acquiesces in his own execution.

The usual escape clause in the genre has the raped woman turning into an avenger by assuming masculine qualities (Raquel Welch learning gunfighter skills in *Hannie Caulder*, Brenda Vaccaro exhibiting her un-womanly technical aptitude in *Death Weekend*, Sondra Locke competing with Clint Eastwood in *Sudden Impact*). But Ferrara has Thana become more seductively feminine in appearance as she transforms into a feminist vigilante. The *reductio ad absurdum* of this process – and indeed of the whole genre – finds Thana murdering such varied male stereotypes as Count Dracula, a cowboy and a drag bride, while incarnated as a furious, gun-toting nun.

Kim Newman, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1984

Abel Ferrara on Ms .45

‘We were aiming at a cold sexuality, a violent tone. Roman Polanski is an influence on all my work. Thana isn’t clearly defined. At times I think her sympathetic, and at other times fascistic. It shook people up to see an innocent person like themselves suddenly become a wanton murderer. She starts out being a little waif who’s afraid of everything and then, when the worst happens to her, she thinks– yeah, I can deal with this, I can turn it around, I’m no victim. We weren’t influenced by feminism, we were influenced by women’.

***Monthly Film Bulletin*, January 1988**

MS .45 (AKA ANGEL OF VENGEANCE)

Director: Abel Ferrara
© Navaron Films Productions
Production Company: Navaron Films Productions
Presented by: Rochelle Films
Executive Producer: Rochelle Weisberg
Associate Producers: Mary Kane, Richard Howorth
Production Associate: Jason Braunstein
Production Managers: Mary Kane, Richard Howorth
Production Assistants: Ernie Jew, Laura Tully, Rex Piano, Vincent Celli, John Outcalt, Damon Santostefano, James Barrata
Screenplay: N.G. St. John [real name: Nicholas St John]
Director of Photography: James Momèl
Assistant Photographer: John Verardi
Dolly Grip: John Paul McIntyre
Effects: John McIntyre
Special Effects: Matt Vogel, Sue Dalton
Editor: Christopher Andrews
Art Director: Ruben Masters
Make-up: Lisa Monteleone
Titles: Summit Screen Service
Music Performed by: Joe Delia
Musician (vocals): Peter Yellen, Sylvia Delia
Music Editor: Christopher Andrews
Music Recording: Sylvia Delia, Larry Alexander
Sound Recording: John McIntyre
Location Sound Recording: Kathleen King
Sound Re-recording: Jack Cooley, Magno Sound
[Sound] Effects Editor: Christopher Andrews
Ballistics: Ed Leiter, Centre Firearms

Cast

Zoe Tamerlis (*Thana*)
Bogey (*Phil*)
Albert Sinkys (*Albert*)
Darlene Stuto (*Laurie*)
Helen Mcgara (*Carol*)
Nike Zachmanoglou (*Pamela*)
Jimmy Laine [Abel Ferrara] (*1st rapist*)
Peter Yellen (*burglar*)
Editta Sherman (*Mrs Nasone*)
Vincent Gruppi (*heckler on corner*)
S. Edward Singer (*photographer*)
Stanley Timms (*pimp*)
Faith Peters (*prostitute*)
Lawrence Zavaglia (*Arab*)
Alex Jachino (*chauffeur*)
Jack Thibeau (*man in bar*)
Jane Kennedy (*seamstress*)
Wayne Caro (*office boy*)
Mariana Tripaldi (*buyer*)
Scott Covert (*buyer’s assistant*)
Karen O’Shea (*model*)
The KOG (*bum*)
Cindy Green (*waitress*)
Nancy Ulrich (*photographer’s girlfriend*)
Eddie Sanchez, Larry Chua, Omar Patino, Robert Allen, Daniel Goodine (*Central Park gang*)
Michael Chin, Gerry Igarashi (*couple kissing*)
Edward Eisele (*man from Georgia*)
Evelyn Smith (*bag lady*)
Patrick Loughran, Eileen Trotta (*couple on desk*)
Bobby Weismann (*party host*)
Alvy Moore, N.G. St. John [real name: Nicholas St John] (*detectives*)
Steve Daskaiwisz (*policeman*)

Paul Varni, John Scarangella, Aris Sakellariois (*guys on street*)
Ben Falk (*blind man*)
Michael Minaro, Robert North, Robert Fish (*band member*)
Harry Maurer (*newsman’s voice*)
Beth Ann Loneragan (*little girl’s voice*)
Gail Wenger, Karen O’Shea, Jana Skidmore, Mary Barto, John Antonio,
Joey Monteleone, Lisa Monteleone, Mary Reeves, Carol Drechsler,
Anthony Picciano, Joe Perce, Donna Harris, Ira Blumenthal, Rex Piano,
Kim Mclean, Paul Sansone, Peter Abbay, Elissa D’Arrigo,
Patrick Loughran, Tony Gandiosi, Renee Belafonte, Dan O’Neill,
Jerry Goralnick (*party*)
Mr O’Neill (*bartender*)
Claver Mullaney, Timothy Pastor, Bill Plunkett, Natalie Rannazzisi,
Michael Rothermel, Rob Roy, Francene Thomas, Bruce Thorne,
Nancy Upton, Bonnie Williams, Scott Winer, Madaline Wood,
Jim Johnson, Ann Barcar, Shelley Freedman, Barbara Jo Fuchs,
Kathi Gati, Barry Gomolka, Gerry Heller, Michelle James, Chris Jones,
Nancy Kleinman, Jerome Lepage, Renata Majer, Tom McGrath,
Cheryl McIntyre (*bar & extras*)

USA 1981
80 mins

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Projecting the Archive: King of the Damned + intro by film writer Jonathan Rigby
Mon 6 Jun 18:20
BFI Members Book Club
Mon 6 Jun 19:00 BFI Reuben Library
Art in the Making: Wot No Art? + intro by BFI National Archive Curator Steve Foxon
Tue 7 Jun 18:30
Experimenta Mixtape: S02 E01 Curated by Onyeka Igwe
Wed 8 Jun 18:00
Behind the Scenes at the BFI: Meet the CEO
Thu 9 Jun 18:20
Silent Cinema: Miss Lulu Bett + intro by BFI National Archive Curator Bryony Dixon
Sun 12 Jun 16:00

BFI Flare: Looking for Langston + discussion
Fri 17 Jun 18:20
Member Picks: Ball of Fire
Sat 18 Jun 15:10
Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Moon, 66 Questions (Selini, 66 erotiseis) + Q&A with writer-director Jacqueline Lentzou
Wed 22 Jun 18:00
Terror Vision: Terror + intro with screenwriter David McGillivray and actor Tricia Walsh
Fri 24 Jun 18:00
Relaxed Screening: In Pursuit of Silence + intro and discussion
Mon 27 Jun 18:20

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