



## WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

# Strange Days

### Strange Days

**Director:** Kathryn Bigelow  
**Production Company:** Lightstorm Entertainment  
**Executive Producers:** Rae Sanchini, Lawrence Kasanoff  
**Producers:** James Cameron, Steven-Charles Jaffe  
**Co-producer:** Ira Shuman  
**Unit Production Manager:** Ira Shuman  
**Production Co-ordinator:** Sharyn Shimada-Higgins  
**Production Accountant:** Stevie Lazo  
**Location Manager:** Robert Goldstein  
**Post-production Supervisor:** David S. Grant  
**2nd Unit Directors:** Phil Pfeiffer, Steven-Charles Jaffe  
**1st Assistant Director:** Steve Danton  
**2nd Assistant Director:** Albert Cho  
**2nd 2nd Assistant Directors:** Suzanne Geiger, Sam Hoffman, Rebecca Strickland  
**Script Supervisor:** Pamela Alch  
**Casting:** Rick Pagano  
**Screenplay:** James Cameron, Jay Cocks  
**Story:** James Cameron  
**Director of Photography:** Matthew F. Leonetti  
**2nd Unit Director of Photography:** Phil Pfeiffer  
**Camera/Steadicam Operator (Main Unit):** James Muro  
**B Camera Operator:** Malcolm Brown  
**Chief Lighting Technician:** Pat Blymyer  
**Key Grip:** Dan Reilly  
**Stills Photography:** Merie W. Wallace  
**Visual Effects Supervisor:** James Lima  
**Visual Effects Producer:** Mike Chambers  
**Visual Effects Editor:** Shannon Leigh Olds  
**Special Visual Effects:** Digital Domain  
**Underwater Miniature Effects/ Photography:** Fantasy II Film Effects  
**Additional Visual Effects:** Light Matters Inc.  
**Special Effects Co-ordinator:** Terry Frazee  
**Video Graphics:**  
Banned from the Ranch Entertainment  
**Graphic Design:** Michael Marcus  
**Editor:** Howard Smith  
**Production Designer:** Lilly Kilvert  
**Art Director:** John Warnke  
**Set Decorator:** Kara Lindstrom  
**Storyboard Artist:** Len Morganti  
**Buyer:** Andrea Fenton  
**Property Master:** Erik Nelson  
**Construction Co-ordinator:** Walt Hadfield  
**Costume Design:** Ellen Mirojnick  
**Costume Supervisor:** Deborah Hopper  
**Make-up Supervisor:** Mike Germain  
**Make-up Artists:** Michael Blake, Deborah La Mia Denaver  
**Hair Design:** Kathy Estocin  
**Hair Supervisor:** Robert L. Stevenson  
**Hairstylists:** Georgina Williams, Laura Connolly  
**Title Design:** The Seiniger Advertising Group  
**Titles/Opticals:** Pacific Title  
**Trode Design:** Donald Carr  
**Playback Deck/Additional Trode Design:** Syd Mead  
**Playback Deck Manufacture:** Stan Winston  
**Trode Manufacture:** Eric Allard  
**Colour Timer:** Dan Muscarella  
**Music:** Graeme Revell  
**Additional Music:** Deep Forest  
**Music Supervisor/Producer:** Randy Gerston  
**Music Editors:** Josh Winget, Allan K. Rosen, Patty Von Arx  
**Sound Design:** Gary Rydstrom  
**Boom Operators:** Don Coufal, Cary Weitz  
**Sound Mixers:** Jeff Wexler, David Ronne  
**Re-recording Mixers:** Tom Johnson,

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

Kathryn Bigelow shoots in light. Cinema's outlaw, she disrupts assumptions about where a film can go, taking genres and ripping them apart to see what they might be made of, always finding the dark stuff inside. Her debut, *The Loveless*, was a studied homage to the 50s biker movie (though in its fascistic fascination with the gleam of chrome and the contours of the leather more specifically Kenneth Anger than *The Wild One*). In *Near Dark*, she took on the Western, infecting it with a vampire-movie strain to produce a terrifying new mythology. Next she skewered assumptions about both genre and gender in *Blue Steel*, a melancholy policier set in a nightmare Manhattan cityscape, predating *The Silence of the Lambs* in its scrutiny of a woman's place in the genre. And in *Point Break*, a kind of 'Only Angels Have Surfboards', the male body is thrust to its limits as Bigelow pushed her cinematic style to its own dizzyingly kinetic limits – in a spume-action movie that knowingly states, 'There is too much testosterone around here.' All these films fray the edges of genre, boasting protagonists who straddle the line between law and disorder. And Bigelow too furtively roams the spectrum, hard to pin down as she plans her raids on movie lore. Hollywood's uncanny daughter, she gets up to all sorts of tricks, her work revealing her art-school background in truly arresting images – the Smith & Wesson in *Blue Steel* that her camera turns into an intricate metallic sculpture – and in her choosing to unstitch (rather than render seamless) cinema's narratives. Which makes her a disquieting presence, unsurprisingly difficult to accommodate.

This rustler's restless desire to confront and challenge the power of the medium is nowhere more evident than in *Strange Days*, Bigelow's most provocative work to date, from a script by James Cameron and (former *Time* film critic and Scorsese collaborator) Jay Cocks. It's a draining, dazing vision of a not-too-distant future in which urban America is ready to ignite, a cyber-*Peeping Tom*-cum-*Vertigo* which puts a further spin on the history of film's own interrogation of voyeuristic desires. Its strange beauty is in the staring, scared eye of the beholder on which the camera lingers in the opening credits: right from the jolting fast-forward false start, it invites a self-reflexive reading of all that unreels before the audience, as we fall, fatally, for what we see, only to be hauled up short, to begin all over again. As with the opening gambit in *Blue Steel*, in which Curtis' Megan is shown going through with an arrest that turns out to be a dummy run, Bigelow demands that we be on our guard concerning what we are about to experience. We should also be on guard about the shape of things to come.

A techno-noir thriller in which lowlife hero Lenny Nero's obsession for a girl who might once have loved him draws him deeper and deeper into darkness, *Strange Days* is a dystopian-nightmare movie set on New Year's Eve 1999, in a decaying, riot-police-patrolled Los Angeles, city of tarnished angels, where teenage girls mug Santa Claus and one can only drive in a bulletproof car. The images the film draws on are only too familiar: including members of the LAPD pulverising Rodney King and the inferno their acquittal sparked. It is a collage of genres, as vérité jostles with romance and detective plot, and with other directors' plots and styles, from Anger through Hitchcock to Walter Hill; it demonstrates film's different possibilities, whether death-wish fulfilment or something more restorative. For amidst a ragged chaos in which the story itself seems to break up and split off into a multitude of endings, *Strange Days* is ultimately able to offer a utopian dream resolution in a final clinch scene, as the black and white protagonists are united amidst a spectacular hail of

Lora Hirschberg, Richard Beggs, Gary Rydstrom  
*Supervising Sound Editor*: Gloria S. Borders  
*Negative Cutter*: Gary Burritt  
*Dialogue Editors*: Barbara McBane, Claire Sanfilippo, Clare Freeman, Sara Bolder  
*Sound Effects Editors*: Frank Eulner, Tim Holland, Phil Benson  
*ADR Editors*: Hugh Waddell, Marian Wilde  
*Foley Artists*: Dennie Thorpe, Tom Barwick  
*Foley Recordist*: Tony Eckert  
*Foley Editors*: Mary Helen Leasman, Sandina Bailo-Lape  
*Stunt Co-ordinator*: Doug Coleman  
*Cast*:  
 Ralph Fiennes (*Lenny Nero*)  
 Angela Bassett (*Lornette 'Mace' Mason*)  
 Juliette Lewis (*Faith Justin*)  
 Tom Sizemore (*Max Peltier*)  
 Michael Wincott (*Philo Gant*)  
 Vincent D'Onofrio (*Burton Steckler*)  
 Glenn Plummer (*Jeriko One*)  
 Brigitte Bako (*Iris*)  
 Richard Edson (*Tick*)  
 William Fichtner (*Dwayne Engelman*)  
 Josef Sommer (*Palmer Strickland*)  
 Joe Urla (*Keith*)  
 Nicky Katt (*Joey Corto*)  
 Michael Jace (*Wade Beemer*)  
 Louise Lecavelier (*Cindy 'Vita' Minh*)  
 David Carrera (*Duncan*)  
 Jim Ishida (*Mr Fumitsu*)  
 Todd Graff (*Tex Arcana*)  
 Malcolm Norrington (*Replay*)  
 Anaïs Muñoz (*Diamanda*)  
 Ted Haler (*tow-truck driver*)  
 Rio Hackford (*Bobby the bartender*)  
 Brook Susan Parker (*Cecile*)  
 Brandon Hammond (*Zander*)  
 Donald 'Donnie' Young, B.J. Crockett (*young Zander*)  
 Dex Elliott Sanders (*Curtis*)  
 Ronnie Willis (*homeboy*)  
 David Packer (*Lane*)  
 Paulo Tocha (*Spaz Diaz*)  
 USA 1995  
 145 mins  
 Digital

Woman with a Movie Camera is generously supported by Jane Stanton

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

Technicolor light (this in a race-cleft Hollywood that still seems to have a problem with the miscegenation romance). Indeed, like cinema itself, *Strange Days* can be viewed in the positive and the negative, as it picks its way through a maze of first-world millennial fears. As such it is both a Cassandra-like storm-warning about distressed political-economic reality, and a disquieting examination of the medium used to portray it.

A range of points-of-view is scanned, the first being that of Nero's down-at-designer-heel ex-cop currently sloping around the city hustling up an illicit trade in the latest technological booty: SQUID, an apparatus that can record audio-visual sensations 'straight from the cortex', allowing experiences to be mainlined from one brain to another, in the form of 30-minute 'playback clips' (the Superconducting Quantum Interference Device was purloined from William Gibson's lexicon, but a similar gizmo is used in both Michael Reeves' 1967 *The Sorcerers* and Douglas Trumbull's 1983 *Brainstorm* – though it's here that the idea's potential is explored to the full). Crucially for the film's mythology, SQUID, devised by the Feds for surveillance purposes but now out on the black market, offers opportunities for men and women to get inside one another's skin. Unsurprisingly, though, Lenny's clients all seem to be men; whether the sheepish husband who wants to err without tarnishing his wedding ring, or the wheelchair-bound amputee who wants the sensation of running again. Like so many dealers, Lenny himself seems to be the most hooked on his wares, replaying choice moments from his relationship with his ex-lover Faith (Juliette Lewis, perfectly cast as a flaky wannabe rock singer), losing himself in these memories and unable to see beyond the playback. (Lenny is played by Ralph Fiennes – in whose eyes one can detect a faint hint of coldness left over from *Schindler's List's* Goeth.)

In this *Vertigo* playback, Lenny is a latter-day Scottie who has fallen for the image, not the substance, of his own sweetly remembered Faith-Madeleine, while Angela Bassett's sinewy, wise, tough-but-tender Mace is a new take on best friend Midge in Hitchcock's film. Bassett played Tina Turner in the recent biopic, *Tina: What's Love Got to Do with It?*; this follow-up role, part Angela Davis, part Cleopatra Jones, continues Bigelow's line of androgynous women with Hawksian heroine-names: *Blue Steel's* Megan and *Point Break's* Tyler (Lori Petty, played with far more substance than she gave *Tank Girl*). Compared to Lenny (the 'Teflon man who is really a goofball romantic'), Mace is a woman of extraordinary mettle, the steadying force who keeps a concerned eye on him and perspective on the disordered world all around. Importantly, she refuses to buy into the playback trip: 'I don't fool with that ... it's porno for wireheads.' Which becomes particularly evident to Lenny when he finds a lethal 'snuff' clip depicting his and Faith's friend Iris being brutally raped and murdered. Shot in a cold, foetid grey-green – one is reminded of the goggle-wearing Jame Gumb's pallid view as he pursues his victims in *The Silence of the Lambs* – this is a flatly framed, degraded vision of murderous desire, cinema warped down to the lowest denominator. Wiring into this brutal vision, Lenny reels in pain. It is a draining, mournful moment: he and we look into Iris' dead eyes and see reflected not just the girl's hooded executor (who has taken her life as casually as one takes a picture), but the many dead eyes of cinema's victims, from Janet Leigh onwards. By refusing to partake of the playback experience, it is Mace, the woman, who sees more clearly what it is all about, and with whom the moral centre of *Strange Days* can ultimately be found. If Mace is Bigelow's alter ego, so is stolen-dream merchant Lenny, as the director negotiates with both the fascination and repulsion of cinema.

Lizzie Francke, *Sight and Sound*, December 1995