



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Devil in a Blue Dress

Devil in a Blue Dress

Director: Carl Franklin

©: TriStar Pictures, Inc.

Production Companies: Clinica Estetico,
Mundy Lane Entertainment

Executive Producers: Jonathan Demme,
Edward Saxon, Denzel Washington

Producers: Gary Goetzman, Jesse Beaton

Associate Producers: Walter Mosley,

Donna Gigliotti, Thomas Imperato

Production Accountant: Steven Shareshian

Production Co-ordinator: Christa Vausbinder

Unit Production Manager: Charles Skouras III

Location Manager: Wayne Middleton

1st Assistant Director: Katterli Frauenfelder

2nd Assistant Director: Mark Cotone

Script Supervisor: Annie Welles

Casting: Victoria Thomas

Screenplay: Carl Franklin

Based on the book by: Walter Mosley

Director of Photography: Tak Fujimoto

Chief Lighting Technician: Gary B. Tandrow

Lenses and Panaflex Camera by: Panavision

Camera Operator: P. Scott Sakamoto

B Camera Operator: Malcolm M. Brown Jr

1st Assistant Camera: Baird Steptoe

2nd Assistant Camera: S. Beth Horton

Key Grip: Bob Rose

Steadicam Operator: P. Scott Sakamoto

Rigging Gaffer: Jerry Enright

Stills Photography: Bruce W. Talamon, D. Stevens

Visual and Digital Effects by: D-Rez

Special Effects Supervisor: Thomas R. Ward

Graphic Designer: Martin Charles

Editor: Carole Kravetz

Production Designer: Gary Fruttkoff

Art Director: Dan Webster

Set Designers: Lauren Polizzi, Cheryl Smith

Set Decorator: Kathryn Peters

Costume Designer: Sharen Davis

Costume Supervisor: Mira Zavidowsky

Key Make-up Artist: Edna M. Sheen

Key Hairstylist: Ken Walker

Titles: Pablo Ferro

Music: Elmer Bernstein

Orchestrations: Emilie A. Bernstein

Choreography: Tony Selznick, Russell Clark

Sound Mixer: Ken Segal

Re-recording Mixers: Gary Bourgeois,

Dan Sherman

Supervising Sound Editor: Robert Grieve

Stunt Co-ordinator: Tony Brubaker

Cast:

Denzel Washington (*Ezekiel 'Easy' Rawlins*)

Jennifer Beals (*Daphne Monet/Ruby Hanks*)

Tom Sizemore (*Dewitt Albright*)

Don Cheadle (*Mouse*)

Maury Chaykin (*Matthew Terell*)

Terry Kinney (*Todd Carter*)

Mel Winkler (*Joppy Shag*)

Lisa Nicole Carson (*Coretta James*)

Albert Hall (*Odell*)

Jernard Burks (*Dupree Brouhard*)

David Fonteno (*Junior Fornay*)

John Roselius (*Detective Jackie Mason*)

Beau Starr (*Detective Miller*)

Steven Randazzo (*Benny Giacomo*)

Scott Lincoln (*Richard McGee*)

L. Scott Caldwell (*Hattie Parsons*)

Barry 'Shabaka' Henley (*woodcutter*)

Nicky Corello (*Shariff*)

Kenny Endoso (*Manny*)

Joseph Latimore (*Frank Green*)

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

Carl Franklin's elegant, intelligent adaptation of Walter Mosley's novel centres on Second World War veteran Easy Rawlins, hired to find a politician's fiancée rumoured to hang out in Los Angeles' Black bars, and subsequently suspected of murder. A pleasingly labyrinthine tale of deceit and betrayal, enhanced by its subtle treatment of race and by the uniformly fine performances of an excellent cast.

bfi.org.uk

A contemporary review

Even as Carl Franklin's *Devil in a Blue Dress* opens in Britain, its presence in the United States has all but evaporated – the critically acclaimed film has earned only \$15 million in six weeks. *Devil* isn't the only film to go belly up last autumn (*Strange Days* and *Assassins* are two other big-ticket flops), but in some ways its failure is the most alarming, indicating as it does Hollywood's failure to sell to mainstream America a black film that defies both stereotype and expectation. Written and directed by the well-respected Franklin, based on a novel by one of the most lauded of modern American detective writers, with one of the industry's hottest stars at its fore, *Devil in a Blue Dress* is a movie that should not have failed. The film racked up reams of glowing reviews and seemed to have a lock on the very best in publicity. Still, there were signs of weakness in the print and television campaigns. One could blame it on O.J. (one LA movie reviewer announced that, post-O.J., white people were too angry to get behind *Strange Days* and its message of racial unity) or just maybe blame it on an industry that one hundred years after its launch still can't escape the Jim Crow logic of separate-but-equal in movies as in life.

Close to the end of the film, Easy Rawlins, a former aircraft worker who's gotten tangled up in mystery and murder runs up a dark staircase, clutching his stomach. Hurt, exhausted and driven by a purpose not yet fully understood, Easy is going to see his old friend Joppy, who may or may not have done him a great wrong. The camera waits for him, picking him out from the shadows. The scene is familiar, a blurred memory from a dozen films *noirs*: the hero, maybe Robert Mitchum, maybe Burt Lancaster, races upstairs. He's wounded and terminally alone. Except that, this time, the scene is shaded differently; this time the man stumbling towards his destiny is played by Denzel Washington.

Based on the sensationally popular novel by Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* is Franklin's follow-up to *One False Move*, his deceptively simple, brutally-felt genre-bender. Both films are crime stories in which violence is less a matter of guts and gunplay than of human passions and the American calamity known as race. Set in post-second World War LA, *Devil* reaches beyond the co-ordinates of story and genre. Although it plays its hand against a pulp tradition that reaches from Raymond Chandler to Chester Himes, the existential crises upon which it twists and turns are rooted in history.

Like a lot of classic *noir*, *Devil in a Blue Dress* opens while the sun is still shining. The camera prowls through a busy Central Avenue afternoon and into Joppy's bar, stopping on Easy, sitting alone at a table. Easy is out of work, and recently fired from a good job. Still, there's a drink on his table. As for the

Renée Humphrey (*Barbara*)
Robert J. Knoll (*Herman*)
Kai Lennox (*Football*)
Poppy Montgomery (*Barbara's sister*)
Brendan Kelly (*Norman, Terell's chauffeur*)
Peggy Rea (*Carter's secretary*)
Vinny Argiro (*Baxter, Carter's valet*)
Deborah Lacey (*Sophie*)
Brazylia Kotere (*neighbourhood woman*)
Jeris Lee Poindexter (*Alphonso Jenkins*)
Frank Davis (*butcher*)
Matt Barry (*cop in car*)
Mark Cotone (*cop in station*)
Brian E. O'Neal (*John's band singer*)
G. Smokey Campbell (*nightclub owner*)
Alan Craig Schwartz (*Johnny*)
Steve Sekely (*Abe*)
J.D. Smith (*pool hall owner*)
Nigel Gibbs (*bootlegger*)
USA 1995©
101 mins
Digital

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*
* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk



BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop. We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

room, it's a study in brown – not the sepia of nostalgia but a dirty yellow through years of nicotine and casual neglect. There are other men in the bar but they're just silhouettes, gone soft in the fading light. Then a white man walks in, and Easy's world collapses.

At the core of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, is a mystery and a couple of murders. Easy has seen death before as a GI in Europe but there's a different kind of death that walks in with the white man, Dewitt Albright. It has to do with the soul, and what it means to put yourself up on the auction block. Because she's known to stray into the company of black men, Albright figures on Easy to search Daphne out ('she likes jazz, pig's feet and dark meat, know what I mean?'). The pay is \$100, more than enough to take care of Easy's mortgage.

Easy eventually finds Daphne but only after he's been plunged into political, racial and sexual intrigue. The central mystery, which works fine in the novel, doesn't make sense in the film because of the curiously misjudged casting of Jennifer Beals as Daphne. The mistake, however, is not a ruinous one. All it proves is that Franklin's heart lies less with the specificity of film *noir* and detective fiction than in the ways he can use them. Franklin's adaptation is faster and leaner than Mosley's book. It knows how to hit the funny notes as well as the hardboiled. Its surprises aren't in empty cigarette packages and dribbles of blood, but in unfathomables like love and hate and the way a man called Mouse can be Easy's oldest friend and still turn a gun on him. Don Cheadle's Mouse is the single biggest shock in the film. Compact, with lustrous ebony skin and a gold cap that catches light, Cheadle enters laughing, maybe because he knows he's about to steal home. Washington may never have been as good as he is here but he pales significantly next to his friend.

Such characters and concerns are new to the American screen but for all of its convolutions, the first half of *Devil* holds to a deliberate, occasionally slow pace with few fluctuations in tone – it's easy does it. When the pace picks up, the body count does too: rage floods the scene then drops to a savage whisper. The first devil that Easy meets is a corpulent creep with a pet baby boy. The second wears a sky blue dress; the third a crisp fedora and a neatly pressed suit and then there's the devil who stares back when things go sour, and the one who comes up from Texas with two cocked guns and a swallowing grin – a Southern Gothic gone north to remind Easy where he's come from. 'They thought I was some kind of new fool,' says Easy at one point of his voice over, 'and I guess I was.' For better and sometimes worse, Easy has left Joppy's bar for good. He's put the *noir* back into film *noir* and crossed over into the world; there's no turning back.

Manohla Dargis, *Sight and Sound*, January 1996

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Devil in a Blue Dress

Fri 1 Mar 20:45; Thu 7 Mar 18:30; Sun 10 Mar 18:30

Jules et Jim

Sat 2 Mar 20:45; Mon 4 Mar 20:30; Mon 11 Mar 20:40; Wed 13 Mar 18:10 + intro

The Killers

Tue 5 Mar 18:15; Sat 9 Mar 18:10; Tue 12 Mar 14:30

In the Cut

Sun 3 Mar 18:20; Wed 6 Mar 18:00 + intro; Fri 8 Mar 20:40