



## Blue Steel

Director: Kathryn Bigelow

Production Company: Lightning Pictures

In association with: Precision Films,

Mack-Taylor Productions

Executive Producer: Lawrence Kasanoff

Producers: Edward R. Pressman, Oliver Stone

Co-producer: Michael Rauch

Associate Producers: Michael Flynn,

Diane Schneider

Production Associate: Anne Damato

Production Manager: Steven Felder

Location Co-ordinators: Richard W. Dooley,

Neri Kyle Tannenbaum

Executive Post-production Supervisor:

Nancy Karaffa

Post-production Supervisor: Kerry Orent

Assistant Directors: Herb Gains, Nathalie Vadim

Casting: Risa Bramon, Billy Hopkins

Extras Casting: Sylvia Fay

Screenplay: Kathryn Bigelow, Eric Red

Director of Photography: Amir Mokri

Additional Photography: Constantine Makris

Camera Operator: Constantine Makris

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Steve Kirshoff

Special Effects: Wilfred Caban

Editor: Lee Percy

Production Designer: Toby Corbett

Set Decorator: Susan Kaufman

Lead Set Dresser: Daniel Mahon

Costume Designer: Richard Shissler

Wardrobe Supervisor: Ingrid Price

Make-up: Toni Trimble

Main Title Design: R/Greenberg Associates

Music: Brad Fiedel

Music Editor: Jim Weidman

Sound Recording: Thomas Brandau

Sound Re-recording (NY): Jack Cooley,

Donald O. Mitchell, Michael Herbick

Sound Re-recording (LA): Kevin O'Connell

Supervising Sound Editor: Richard King

Sound Editors: Patricia Sandy Bennett,

Elliot Deitch, Michael Steinfeld

ADR Editor: Hal Levinsohn

2nd ADR Editor: Trissy Bowers

Stunt Co-ordinator: Jerry Hewitt

Cast:

Jamie Lee Curtis (*Megan Turner*)

Ron Silver (*Eugene Hunt*)

Clancy Brown (*Nick Mann*)

Elizabeth Peña (*Tracy Perez*)

Louise Fletcher (*Shirley Turner*)

Philip Bosco (*Frank Turner*)

Kevin Dunn (*Assistant Chief Stanley Hoyt*)

Richard Jenkins (*Attorney Mel Dawson*)

Markus Flanagan (*husband*)

Mary Mara (*wife*)

Skipp Lynch (*instructor*)

Mike Hodge (*police commissioner*)

Mike Starr (*superintendent*)

Chris Walker (*Officer Jeff Travers*)

Tom Sizemore (*wool cap*)

David Iliku (*counterman*)

Andrew Hubatsek (*cashier*)

Joe Jamrog (*doorman*)

Matt Craven (*Howard*)

Reginald Wells (*1st TV announcer*)

Heidi Kempf (*2nd TV announcer*)

Toni Darling (*prostitute*)

William Jay Marshall (*hood*)

James Shannon (*maitre d'*)

Thomas Dorff (*businessman victim*)

William Wise (*internal affairs man*)

## Close to the Edge: The Films of Kathryn Bigelow

# Blue Steel

**Kathryn Bigelow:** With *Blue Steel* I wanted to do a 'woman's action film', putting a woman at the centre of a movie predominantly occupied by men. When women go to see *Lethal Weapon*, many of them will identify with Mel Gibson. I was interested in creating a person at the centre of an action film who represents an Everyman that both women and men could identify with. At our initial screenings at the Berlin Film Festival, some men at the press conference commented that they found themselves for the first time in their lives identifying with a woman. I found this very interesting because finally the notion of self-preservation is universal. I wanted to create a very strong, capable person who just happens to be a woman, using the context of the police genre.

*Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1990 (Adapted from a profile of Kathryn Bigelow in BBC2's *Moving Pictures*; thanks to Paul Kerr and Sally Rowland)

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

## A contemporary review

After the cult success of the vampire Western *Near Dark*, Kathryn Bigelow is once more on dangerous ground. *Blue Steel* is a foray into the nightmare world of a young woman cop who comes face to face with the distorted mirror image of her own desire for power and control when she falls in love with a murderer. As with *Near Dark*, the central character is an innocent who discovers within herself demons she never knew existed and which drive her to risk everything in a primeval battle for survival. Also like *Near Dark*, survival is as much a matter of coming to terms with internal dark forces as of vanquishing external evil.

The themes are hardly new: 'deadly love' precedents abound, from *film noir* to *Spellbound* to *Eyes of Laura Mars* and *Jagged Edge*. *Blue Steel* is a *noir*-influenced police movie which, like Michael Mann's *Manhunter* (to which it pays homage in the name of Megan's partner Nick and in its pervasive blue light), hinges an obsessional scenario on the extravagant rituals of serial killing. Eugene Hunt's paranoid fantasies and murderous ceremonies may lack the gruesome panache of the Red Dragon, but Bigelow adds a different dimension by making the pursuing law officer a woman (foreshadowing Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*). By becoming a cop, Megan Turner makes herself, like Hunt, an outcast, a freak whose motives are always in question.

At her graduation, Megan's best friend Tracy exclaims in admiration: 'You're on the right side of the law!' Megan soon discovers that this is an uncomfortable, if not impossible place for a woman. Her father rejects her, potential suitors panic and take flight, her superior officers patronise and bully her, and the man she loves fetishises her. The film celebrates her perversity, making much of Jamie Lee Curtis' androgyny and of Megan's pleasure in dressing in uniform. But her entry into the predominantly male world of law enforcement is fraught with hazards, not just because of her inexperience (she makes a lot of mistakes) but because she is cast adrift in a deadly, hostile environment whose codes are unfamiliar to her, where nothing can be taken for granted except her vulnerability. It is not just her life, but her identity that Megan puts at risk.

Lauren Tom (*female reporter*)  
 Faith Geer (*lady bum*)  
 Doug Barron (*1st reporter*)  
 Carol Schneider (*2nd reporter*)  
 L. Peter Callender (*3rd reporter*)  
 Becky Galke (*1st nurse*)  
 Frank Girardeau (*uniform cop*)  
 Larry Silvestri (*precinct cop*)  
 John Capodice (*trial commissioner*)  
 Sam Coppola (*PBA representative*)  
 Bellina Logan (*1st rookie*)  
 Ralph Nieves (*homicide detective*)  
 Al Cerullo (*helicopter pilot*)  
 Michael Del Rio (*John Perez*)  
 Harley Flannagan (*1st punk*)  
 James Drescher (*2nd punk*)  
 USA 1989©  
 102 mins  
 35mm

35mm print courtesy of the Cinema Museum



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This is evident in the way her lover/adversary Eugene invades every aspect of her being, even her dreams, claiming her as his other half and uncannily turning up to threaten her most intimate moments. A tense, edgy sequence in which Megan returns home with her father after arresting him for wife-beating, to find Eugene sitting on the sofa making small talk with her mother, is skilfully handled both in terms of suspense and in its implication that violence has its roots in the private arena of familial-sexual power relations. The scene echoes the film's explosive opening, in which Megan, on a training exercise involving domestic violence, 'shoots' the husband, only to be 'shot' herself by the wife.

Megan's Oedipal motivations drive her to challenge male authority and reject her destiny as a victim. The key to her survival is her gun, a double-edged weapon which endows her with power and authority, yet simultaneously transforms her into a fetish object. The mythical, erotic beauty of the gun is emphasised in the sensuous credit sequence, at the culmination of which the audience finds itself staring into the barrel of a Smith and Wesson. *Blue Steel* explores a spectrum of emotions generated by gun worship, from Megan's desire for justice to Eugene's fantasies of omnipotence. Megan is horrified when confronted by Eugene's adoration of her weapon, the power-crazed image of her he creates; yet it is only by acknowledging the supremacy of the gun, and by putting herself with Eugene outside the law, that she is able to defeat him, after a prolonged battle in which many innocent bystanders are put in danger.

The justification for Megan's obsessively hunting down Eugene lies, as usual in the contemporary police film, in the impotence of the official law enforcement agencies. The rape scene (the last in of a series of monstrous assaults perpetrated by Eugene on Megan and those close to her), during which she kicks him off, causing him to fly several feet into the air, and wounds him before he escapes, cannot fail to engage sympathy for her subsequent actions, especially since Eugene, like all demons, stubbornly refuses to die. Yet her final victory is less a triumph than a loss. Megan sits in a catatonic state in a car, her gun on the seat beside her, as a cop lifts her, childlike, into his arms and the screen is suffused with a melancholy blue. In killing Eugene, it seems, she has also destroyed herself.

Pam Cook, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1990