



Close to the Edge: The Films of Kathryn Bigelow

A House of Dynamite

A House of Dynamite

Directed by: Kathryn Bigelow

©: Netflix

Production Companies: First Light Productions, Kingsgate Films, Prologue Entertainment

Presented by: Netflix

Executive Producers: Brian Bell, Sarah Bremner
Produced by: Greg Shapiro, Kathryn Bigelow, Noah Oppenheim

Unit Production Manager: Brian Bell

Financial Controller: Steve Guilbaud

Supervising Location Manager: Ryan Smith

Location Manager: Leila Nurse

Post-production Supervisors: Luca Borghese, Luca Borghese

2nd Unit Director: George Cottle

1st Assistant Director: Simon Warnock

Costing by: Susanne Scheel

Written by: Noah Oppenheim

Director of Photography: Barry Ackroyd

2nd Unit Directors of Photography: Eric Moynier, John Garrett

A Camera Operator: Barry Ackroyd

Stills Photography: Eros Hoagland

Visual Effects Supervisor: Chris Harvey

Visual Effects by: Distillery VFX

Special Effects Supervisor: Devin Maggio

Edited by: Kirk Baxter

Production Designer: Jeremy Hindle

Art Director: Ann Bartek

Set Decorator: David Schlesinger

Costume Designer: Sarah Edwards

Department Head Make-up: Jackie Risotto

Department Head Hair: Kerrie Smith

Main and End Titles Designed by: Teddy Blanks

Finishing Colourist: Stephen Nakamura

Colour and Finish by: Company 3

Music by: Volker Bertelmann

Score Performed by:

London Contemporary Orchestra

Music Supervisor: George Drakoulis

Sound Design by: Paul N.J. Ottosson

Production Sound Mixer: Thomas Varga

Re-recording Mixer: Paul N.J. Ottosson

Supervising Sound Editor: Paul N.J. Ottosson

Stunt Co-ordinators: George Cottle, Mark Fichera

Thanks: Roeg Sutherland

Cast:

Idris Elba (*POTUS [US president]*)

Rebecca Ferguson (*Captain Olivia Walker*)

Gabriel Basso

(*Deputy National Security Advisor Jake Baerington*)

Jared Harris (*Secretary of Defense Reid Baker*)

Tracy Letts (*General Anthony Brody*)

Anthony Ramos (*Major Daniel Gonzalez*)

Moses Ingram (*Cathy Rogers*)

Jonah Hauer-King

(*Lieutenant Commander Robert Reeves*)

Greta Lee (*Anna Park*)

Jason Clarke (*Admiral Mark Miller*)

Malachi Beasley (*SCPO William Davis*)

Brian Tee (*SAIC Ken Cho*)

Brittany O'Grady (*Lily Baerington*)

Gbenga Akinnagbe (*Major General Steven Kyle*)

Willia Fitzgerald (*Abby Jansing*)

Renée Elise Goldsberry (*First Lady*)

Kyle Allen (*Captain Jon Zimmer*)

Kaitlyn Dever (*Caroline Baker*)

USA 2025©

112 mins

Digital

'The thing is, it's hard for me to analyse what I do because I'm always in the moment and trying to move forward.' Kathryn Bigelow has come to London by train from Paris, where she was being honoured by the Cinémathèque française. 'I met Costa-Gavras,' the Cinémathèque's president, best known as the director of *Z* (1969). 'He's a hero of mine, and I told him, "You invented the political thriller." You couldn't do this movie if it hadn't been for him.' 'This movie' is *A House of Dynamite*, Bigelow's first in eight years, and the most sheerly compelling of her career, moving forward with the relentlessness of a rocket.

Bigelow's career has in fact been a series of forward moves: from art into film, from high style into realism, from fiction into journalism – and indeed, from stasis into motion, spectacle into narrative. Her first feature *The Loveless* (1981, co-directed with Monty Montgomery), a postmodern biker movie that makes a fetish of 1950s Americana while constantly evoking its violent undertow, 'was really an effort to suspend the narrative. If it were a piece of music it would be one note. Whereas shooting *A House of Dynamite* was like four-dimensional chess.' A nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) is bearing down on Chicago and the US military and political leadership have about 18 minutes to try to stop it and to decide on a response. We see the same 18 minutes play out three times, focusing on three sets of characters, but with a great deal of overlap since everyone in the film is in near-constant communication with one another.

'It was incredibly complex to shoot, and the script [by Noah Oppenheim] was meticulous.' The momentum is sustained through the repetitions as each one introduces new dimensions to the story. Deeply researched and shot without gloss, *A House of Dynamite* is the culmination of all of Bigelow's forward moves, the central pivot in which was *The Hurt Locker* (2008), a bomb-disposal drama set in Iraq, in which her newfound yen for realism, and for journalism, came together for the first time. She herself calls it a 'breathtaking transition'; it was also a kind of comeback after *K-19: The Widowmaker* (2002), a starchy and expensive Cold War thriller, set aboard a Russian submarine, that underperformed at the box office. Made on a much lower budget, and shot on 16mm, primarily in Jordan, *The Hurt Locker* won the Best Picture Oscar, and, for Bigelow personally, the Directing Oscar. She was the first woman to win the award, and the last for more than a decade, but she has never made a big thing of it, whereas she talks about being screened at the Cinémathèque as 'surreal, an out of body experience'.

The two films that followed *The Hurt Locker*, *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), about the US military's hunt for Osama Bin Laden, and *Detroit* (2017), set during the riots of 1967, were in the same vein, and based on historical events, and while *A House of Dynamite* is speculative, it is likewise based on intimate knowledge of America's defence establishment. What is new within this phase of Bigelow's career is *A House of Dynamite's* narrative intricacy, its rapid cycling between locations and extensive use of telecommunications. It would not be inaccurate to say that the film's true location is the ether. In the third act, as the president barrels through Washington DC, we barely notice the sight of his motorcade, and the constant disruption involved in keeping it moving, because the main

Close to the Edge: The Films of Kathryn Bigelow

The Loveless

Sun 1 Feb 18:30; Fri 20 Feb 21:10;
Mon 2 Feb 18:20

Near Dark

Tue 3 Feb 21:00; Sun 22 Feb 18:30

Blue Steel

Sat 7 Feb 18:30; Mon 23 Feb 20:55

Strange Days

Sun 8 Feb 18:00; Sun 15 Feb 18:00;
Tue 24 Feb 20:10

The Hurt Locker

Tue 10 Feb 20:25; Sat 21 Feb 17:20;
Fri 6 Mar 20:20

Point Break

Fri 13 Feb 17:50; Fri 27 Feb 20:30;
Sat 14 Mar 20:30

K-19: The Widemaker

Fri 13 Feb 20:20; Sat 7 Mar 17:30

The Weight of Water

Mon 16 Feb 20:30; Sat 28 Feb 18:00

Zero Dark Thirty

Tue 3 Mar 20:00; Sun 8 Mar 14:30

A House of Dynamite

Thu 5 Mar 17:50; Sat 14 Mar 18:15;
Tue 17 Mar 20:40

Detroit

Fri 13 Mar 20:15; Mon 16 Mar 17:45

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drama is taking place somewhere on the electromagnetic spectrum; and yet the sequence has the power it possesses because the motorcade is as real as can be. The principals, Bigelow tells me, were in the vehicles, not in the studio.

Still, although *A House of Dynamite* is highly plausible, and although it is new and distinctively of the 2020s, it is also of a piece with Bigelow's films before *The Hurt Locker* and her shift to realism, most obviously *Strange Days* (1995), which was, after all, an apocalyptic prophecy of the technological near future. For all that she is keen to present *A House of Dynamite* as an urgent 'cautionary tale' for a generation (or two) who have grown up since the Cold War, in relative ignorance of the possibility of instant nuclear annihilation, it can be seen as a vindication of *Strange Days*' predictions of an 'increasingly mediated' environment, as she described it at the time. The main characters in *A House of Dynamite* experience the world almost exclusively through screens – we never actually see the ICBM – while they are constantly being looked at through them in turn, and frequently having to authenticate themselves, at the mercy of their devices. The stakes are unusually high, but they are just like us.

Perversely or otherwise, Bigelow's films from *Blue Steel* onwards betray a fascination with the protocols of the straight world alongside the desire for unmediated experience manifested by countercultural figures like *Point Break*'s Bodhi; indeed, some of her most extreme thrill-seekers, such as Jeremy Renner's character in *The Hurt Locker*, are feeding their need from within the most tightly routinised parts of the machine.

A House of Dynamite may seem some way distant from these concerns, but its characters are the most governed by protocol of any in Bigelow's career, as well as the most distanced from real, unmediated experience. And by showing the astounding efforts we have collectively made, as a species, to make nuclear annihilation an ever-present possibility, it is also in keeping with the rest of her films in tracing the lineaments of the death drive beneath modern civilisation's apparently rational surface. Her response to this? 'I don't know, it's a real reach.'

Henry K. Miller, *Sight and Sound*, December 2025