



Jodi Foster in *The Brave One*

The Stranger

Jodi Foster on a killing spree

THE BRAVE ONE: Directed by Neil Jordan. Written by Roderick Taylor, Bruce A. Taylor and Cynthia Mort. Cinematography, Philippe Rousselot. Music, Dario Marianelli. Starring Jodi Foster, Terrence Howard, Nicky Katt, Naveen Andrews and Mary Steenburgen. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2007. R. 119 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Erica Bain (Jodi Foster) is in love with New York. Each week, Bain hosts the fictional "Streetwalk" radio show — an über-literate stroll through the forgotten corridors of New York — during which she brings alive her city's kaleidoscopic infrastructure. A typical Bain oration will tell you that the Plaza is a fine hotel, but only insofar as it's the setting for the *Eloise* books. In her slightly papery but honey-tongued delivery, Bain's message is a determined *love it or lose it*. It's an ironic theme, because as everybody knows, *The Brave One* is also about Bain's other great love, her fiancé David Kirmani (Naveen Andrews, of *Lost*). Early in *The Brave One*, David is taken from Erica, an event which the movie telegraphs in two ways. One, David is the

ous but only ends up seeming less dangerous for it. Now, frightened of her own shadow, Erica decides to buy a gun illegally, a significant test of will for both Erica — darling of the NPR set — and Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*), director of *The Brave One*. The gun shop scenes are crucial and mostly effective; we truly believe that Erica may not have the nerve for vigilantism. But the second test is a great deal more complicated, for it involves Erica taking her first life. When the time comes, it's unconvincing: Erica gets caught in the middle of a holdup seemingly hours after purchasing her gun. At any rate, Erica's transformation is complete: She is now officially armed and dangerous. Whether any of it is credible is another matter altogether.

Fortunately, Erica's killing spree allows Detective Mercer (Terrence Howard) plenty of screen time. Mercer is a role that just a few years ago would have gone automatically to Denzel Washington, who to me has hardened onscreen in the past few years. Instead, it's a quiet breakthrough for Howard (*Hustle & Flow*), who understands the intensity of a whisper. There are some fine exchanges between Mercer and Erica, touched off largely by what Mercer doesn't know: Mercer, a fan of Erica's radio program, is investigating both her crime spree and the murder of her fiancé. Mercer, of course, thinks he's looking for a male, but he's the type of cop that won't be fooled for very long.

I mentioned credibility. I also mentioned the race issue. One of the many problems with *The Brave One* is how dated it seems in its *Death Wish* worldview. This is a story that, if properly handled, should be asking, *How does one live after the murder of a loved one?* What we get is a dystopic vision of Manhattan in which all the victims are black or Hispanic while Erica runs around like Linda Wertheimer packing heat. Erica doesn't negotiate. She kills when she doesn't have to. She even tape-records her crimes. (Conveniently, witnesses don't appear in *The Brave One*.) With its fine performers, *The Brave One* could have investigated what happens when conscience and morality are sacrificed to the impulse for revenge. Instead, we just get revenge without consequence. There's nothing brave about it.

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12:10, 1:30, 3:35, 4:05, 5:10, 7:05, 7:50, 9:40, 10:25

THE BRAVE ONE R
12:20, 1:20, 3:25, 4:20, 6:30, 7:25, 9:30, 10:30

DRAGON WARS PG13
2:10, 4:35, 7:35, 10:00

MR. WOODCOCK PG13
12:15, 2:55, 5:25, 7:50, 10:15

3:10 TO YUMA R
*12:30, 1:35, *3:20, 4:30, *7:00, 7:45, *9:50, 10:35
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[12:15] 2:40, 5:05, 7:40, 9:50

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[12:50] 4:25, 7:35, 10:15

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3:20, 10:20

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[12:25] 4:15, 8:00

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[12:20] 2:50, 5:10, 7:20, 9:40

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[12:10] 2:35, 4:55, 7:25, 9:45

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