



True Lies

Director: James Cameron

©/Production Company: Lightstorm Entertainment
Presented by:

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Executive Producers: Robert Shriver, Rae Sanchini,
Lawrence Kasanoff

Produced by: James Cameron, Stephanie Austin

Associate Producer: Pamela Easley

Unit Production Managers: Scott Thaler,

Patricia Whitcher

Production Supervisor: Paddy Cullen

Production Accountant: Susannah L. Brengel

Supervising Location Manager:

Michael J. Burmeister

2nd Unit Directors: E.J. Foerster, Glenn Wilder

1st Assistant Directors: J. Michael Haynie,

Aldric La'Auli Porter

Key 2nd Assistant Director: Martin Jedlicka

Script Supervisor: Sharron Reynolds

Casting: Mali Finn

Screenplay: James Cameron

Based upon a screenplay by: Claude Zidi,

Simon Michaël, Didier Kaminka

Director of Photography: Russell Carpenter

Underwater Cameraman: Peter Romano

Aerial Photographer: David L. Butler

Camera Operators: Michael St. Hilaire, Paul Babin

B Camera/Steadicam Operator: James Muro

Chief Lighting Technician: Rick A. West

Still Photographer: Zade Rosenthal

Special Visual Effects: Digital Domain, Cinesite

Digital Film Center, Boss Film Corporation,

Fantasy II Film Effects

Additional Visual Effects: PDI

Additional Digital Effects: Pacific Title Digital, Inc.

Light Matters

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Thomas L. Fisher

Edited by: Conrad Buff, Mark Goldblatt,

Richard A. Harris

Production Designer: Peter Lamont

Art Directors: Robert Laing, Michael Novotny

Set Designer: Joseph Hodges

Property Master: Charles Stewart

Costume Designer: Marlene Stewart

Costume Supervisor: Lisa Lövaas

Make-up Supervisor: Jeff Dawn

Animal Effects: Make-up & Effects Labs

Key Hairstylist: Peter Tothpal

Music: Brad Fiedel

Conductor: Shirley Walker

Music Supervision: Randy Gerston

Music Editor: Allan Rosen

Scoring Mixer: Tim Boyle

Choreographer: Lynne Hockney

Sound Design: SounDelux

Sound Mixer: Lee Orloff

Re-recording Mixers: Mike Minkler, Robert Beemer

Supervising Sound Editors: Wylie Stateman,

Gregg Baxter

Sound Effects Editors: Scott Martin Gershin, Peter

Michael Sullivan, Randy Kelly, Jay B. Richardson,

David Kneupper, Dino DiMuro, Mark A. Lanza, Peter

J. Lehman, Brian McPherson, Michael Cook,

Christopher Assells, Clayton Collins, Dan Hegeman

Stunt Co-ordinator: Joel Kramer

Cast:

Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Harry Tasker*)

Jamie Lee Curtis (*Helen Tasker*)

Tom Arnold (*Gib*)

Bill Paxton (*Simon*)

Tia Carrere (*Juno*)

Art Malik (*Aziz*)

James Cameron

True Lies

SPOILER WARNING

The following notes give away some of the plot.

Watching James Cameron's films, I sometimes experience what I imagine the Lumière's original audiences must have felt: a mixture of disbelief and delight, and a sense of wonderment at the magic of the movies. *True Lies* has several such moments, my favourite being the scene in which Arnie, on horseback, gallops after evil Aziz (Art Malik), who is on a motorcycle. The chase takes us through busy streets, a hotel lobby, up an elevator and across tall buildings. It is silly stuff – but silly stuff is rarely so thrilling.

Spectacle films don't rely on the same types of realism as genres such as domestic comedies, but verisimilitude nonetheless remains an important criterion. We know that Arnold Schwarzenegger isn't actually flying the jet in *True Lies*, yet if we could see how the effect was constructed (by detecting the matting, morphing or miniatures, for example), our pleasure would be lost. Part of the joy of Cameron's films (and this applies even to *Piranha II: The Spawning*) is that they trick us so well.

Critical response to *True Lies* has so far been mixed. My local newspaper in Montreal awarded the film only two stars, recommending that audiences wait until it is released on video – as ridiculous a piece of advice as one is likely to get. The film offers many pleasures (humour, romance), but perhaps the greatest, the one unavailable on video, is what the bulk of its reputed \$120 million budget was spent on – the creation of particular kinds of spectacle (luxurious sets, exotic locations, huge boys' toys, high-speed chases, dramatic shoot-outs and extravagant explosions) whose enjoyment is predicated on widescreen viewing and increased by audience participation. Unlike *La Totale!* (the 1991 French film directed by Claude Zidi on which Cameron's work is based), whose effects are not diminished on a small screen, *True Lies* is a film to see at the movies.

A comparison of *La Totale!* and *True Lies* can probably tell us much about the specificity of French and American national cultures. But such a comparison also points up some of the characteristics of the contemporary big-budget American spectacle film, Cameron and Schwarzenegger's speciality both in their previous collaborations (*The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*) and in the rest of their individual oeuvres. Watching *La Totale!* reminds us that *True Lies* is a type of cinema rarely feasible outside Hollywood. Smaller national cinemas cannot afford and do not have similar access to cutting-edge special effects technology (much less the opportunity to develop it with particular films in mind, as Cameron did for *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2*). Only Hollywood can maintain an infrastructure which keeps employed personnel skilled in a wide range of narrowly specialised areas of filmmaking.

In both *True Lies* and *La Totale!*, a couple, happily married for many years, find their marriage in trouble. The wife (Helen Tasker, played by Jamie Lee Curtis in Cameron's film) is approaching middle age and longs for excitement at least once in her life. She does not know that her husband Harry (Schwarzenegger) has lied to her throughout their marriage and is in fact a highly glamorous secret agent rather than the boring nine-to-fiver she believes him to be. Her would-be paramour Simon (Bill Paxton) is also lying to her: while trying to seduce her by posing as an agent and taking credit for her husband's exploits,

Eliza Dushku (*Dana*)
Grant Heslov (*Faisil*)
Marshall Manesh (*Khaled*)
James Allen (*colonel*)
Dieter Rauter (*boathouse guard*)
Jane Morris (*Janice*)
Katsy Chappell (*Allison*)
Crystina Wyler (*Charlene*)
Ofer Samra (*Yusif*)
Paul Barselou (*old guy in bathroom*)
Chuck Tamburro (*helicopter pilot*)
Jean-Claude Parachini (*Jean-Claude*)
Uzi Gal (*lead terrorist*)
Majed Ibrahim (*high-rise terrorist*)
Armen Ksajikian (*Juno's chauffeur*)
Mike Akrawi (*Jihad cameraman*)
Mike Cameron (*citation pilot*)
Charles Cragin (*Samir*)
Louai Mardini (*bread van terrorist 1*)
Gino Salvano (*bread van terrorist 2*)
SSgt Scott Dotson (*Harrier pilot*)
Tom Isbell (*reporter at hi-rise*)
John Bruno (*custodian*)
Charlton Heston (*Spencer Trilby*) *
USA 1994
141 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

Supported by



he is in fact a used-car salesman. By the end of the film, the husband has neutralised the competition and recruited the wife into his organisation. Working together, they keep their marriage spicy and their country safe.

True Lies and *La Totale!* not only share this almost identical plot (and a subplot about Arab terrorists stealing weapons and wanting to blow things up), but the former also borrows situations, props and even lines of dialogue from the latter. Yet the two films belong to different genres (or perhaps more accurately deploy different combinations of elements from various genres), and indeed to different modes altogether. *La Totale!* mixes elements from the picaresque sex comedy, the domestic melodrama, the buddy-cop film and the spy film. But as one would expect from the director of *Les Ripoux*, the film's primary aim is to make the audience laugh. *True Lies* mixes elements from the screwball comedy, the domestic melodrama (both films are family romances), the buddy-cop film (the Tom Arnold-Arnold Schwarzenegger relationship can be read as a twist on that of Mel Gibson and Danny Glover in the *Lethal Weapon* films), and the spy film (though the spectacular elements and hero's panache are drawn more specifically from the big-budget Bond movies). But as one would expect from the director of *Aliens*, the film's primary aim is to provide spectacle that will thrill, chill and awe the audience.

The comic elements in *True Lies* are successfully realised, but though they are sometimes combined with spectacle, they most often alternate with it, just as the film switches between the domestic and public spheres, and push the narrative forward. The first scene in the film is an action scene; the last a comic one. Both feature a tango. At the beginning Schwarzenegger dances with the sexy Asian villainess (Tia Carrere); by the end he's dancing with his all-American wife. Their marriage is saved, the United States is free of Arab terrorists, the former suitor is made to pee in his pants at the feel of a lipstick and the hero and heroine tango into the night. *True Lies* may just be an embroidered *La Totale!*, but the embroidery is so extensive and skilful as to constitute a different object.

José Arroyo, *Sight and Sound*, September 1994

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

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

Buy a can for the BFI National Archive

Next year the BFI National Archive needs 1,500 new film cans to safely store 16mm and 35mm film. Donate £5 to buy a can for the Archive, and help us safeguard the future of film.



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/subscribe



Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged | Browse online at thebfi.org/programme-notes

Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk