

# The Devniad, Book 8

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APA:NESFA #305, October 1995

## Strange Days Indeed.

Rushing toward the millennium with twisted memories in his head and desperation in his eyes, Lenny is a dealer. His product makes heroin seem stale, flat, and unprofitable.

Lenny pushes playback. Illegal, full-sensory-spectrum recordings of actual experiences. Playback isn't the next best thing to being there; to all intents, a playback recording *is* being there.

Naturally, since this is Los Angeles in the last 2 days of 1999, the recordings we see in *Strange Days* mostly involve sex, robbery, rape, rollerblading, police brutality, and murder.

Not much of an imaginative stretch from current LA lifestyles there. Nor anywhere else in this intense, messy, ultimately unsatisfying new science fiction film directed by Katherine Bigelow (*Near Dark*, *Blue Steel*, *Point Break*) and coproduced/cowritten by James Cameron (both *Terminators*, *The Abyss*, *Aliens*, *True Lies*).

*Strange Days* is the tale of how Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes) fiddles around during the last 48 hours before all the calendars run out.

He wheels. Deals. Slides from clubs to bars to hotel rooms. Drifts through the permanent floating riot smoldering on the city's streets, all mean all the time. Has his Mercedes impounded. Moons after his old lover (Juliette Lewis), a rock star dominated by a scary promoter (Michael Wincott). Wears cool neckties. And begs help from two friends, ex-cops like himself: a burnt-out private eye (Tom Sizemore) and a single

mom (Angela Bassett) trying to stay straight but weakened by her hopeless (and inexplicable) crush on Lenny.

As everyone gets sucked into a vortex surrounding the high-profile death of a rap star, it becomes clear that everything hinges on vital evidence contained on -- surprise! -- a missing playback clip. Yada yada yada....

The best thing about *Strange Days* may be its vocabulary. There *is* talent behind this movie. Look how smoothly new or borrowed terms are integrated into natural-sounding dialog. Not a negligible accomplishment for SF worldbuilding, but a task filmmakers usually perform poorly if at all.

The enabling technology is called a *SQUID*, for superconducting quantum interface device. Lenny's wares are *clips* that run on *decks* resembling Walkmen. To *wiretrip*, a *wirehead* simply *jacks in* and plays back. One product category Lenny won't deal: *blackjacks* -- the you-are-there equivalent of snuff films.

The best neologism may be the movie's shortest. It's a slang tag for the new year. For the first millisecond, you may just hear echoes of the words "toucan," "ofay." Then you realize what they're really saying: "tookay."

The year 2000 cut to a fast, smartass, tekked-out alphanumeric: "2K."

Now that's slick. And as far as I know, original. Or has anyone listening seen it somewhere else first?

The performances also are fine. It's not Fienne's fault that you get sick of Lenny real soon. (*You* try playing a wet-eyed, naive, romantic...cynical ex-vice

cop burnout pusher.) And Bassett especially is fiercely good.

There's plenty here that many science fiction fans would find interesting. It's a big-budget character study made by serious filmmakers, players with some respectable SF credits. It even comes close to showing a dystopia -- not the kind of location where Hollywood often sets up shop.

But the story and characterizations are clichéd or mushy. The director has a dazzling gift for the obvious. The finale is hysterical. The music is loud. The colors are dark. The camera shakes around a lot. You'd think it was the end of the millennium or something....

The creators of *Strange Days* must have asked themselves, what do you get if you cross *Blade Runner* with *Brainstorm*? The answer should be, a better movie than this.

### **Backchat**

**on last time's APA:NESFA  
(# 304, September 1995)**

#### **To Tony Lewis**

What's Ben Bova really like?

At second glance, I know that name! Your mystery photo person is Tansu Ciller, elected prime minister of Turkey in 1993 despite her gender....Must be a relative of Suford's.

#### **To Joe Ross**

Bet that old Cleveland Spiders team collected a record number of fly balls.

#### **To Leslie Turek**

Thanks for the attaboy on the Zelazny piece.

Hoping for your trip report this ish.

#### **To Mark Olson**

Enjoyed your con report, part deux, muchly. A distributed program team is "a route to higher quality, not a route to less work." That's profoundly true for the Computer Age itself, isn't it?

My sisters Darcy and Liz are Britain-bound next spring; may yet drag my brother Michael and me along. They've been saving for months, while I'll begin my financial planning as the bus to the airport pulls up. But these great trip reports may yet serve me well.

#### **To Michael Burstein**

No problem with the name mixup. Just don't call me late to dinner.

Should have e-mail RSN. See comment that crossed yours last ish.

#### **To Mark Hertel**

Great to see you at the last meet.

British roast-beef-flavor potato chips do sound strange. But as a fan of B&J's Chubby Hubby ice cream, I'm in no position to point my pudgy little digit.

Ah, *The Witches of Karres* -- pure magic! I've given away six copies to little girls, who never give them back...

#### **To Tom Endrey**

Your Steele and Turtledove kaffeeklatsches especially sounded fun. My favorites at other cons have been Joe Haldeman and Martha Soukup.

#### **To Elizabeth Carey**

Think *Constitution* is refitted now. Will have to check out the Boston Stone.

Thanks for the kind words on the unkind Honor Harrington piece.

I also loved the LeGuin. Must get to your Griffith and Williams recs.