



Changeling

Angelina Jolie and John Malkovich star in a film written by J. Michael Straczynski and directed by Clint Eastwood.

By Josef Woodard

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Clint Eastwood's amazing run of great work in the past several years has created something of a happy problem for the filmmaker, setting a high standard against which even a perfectly fine film like *Changeling* seems less dazzling than it should be. In this true story (with minor fudging and character enhancements) of LAPD corruption, a serial killer, and other sordid events disrupting a scenario of would-be domestic bliss, Eastwood again shows his mastery of filmic storytelling. It's just that the new model fails to rise to the wowing level of his immediately previous works—*Mystic River*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *Flags of Our Fathers*. Even so, *Changeling* is engaging cinema, a well-crafted period piece film noir venture with a warm heart and a quality surpassing the bulk of the competition out there.

Did we mention that Angelina Jolie is at the epicenter? Much as Jolie does her level best as a single mother whose life is turned asunder in the quest to recover her missing son amidst the socio-political police house of cards in late '20s Los Angeles, we can't help but dwell on the presence of the tabloid-blinding mega-star. At some key point, she winds up thrown into the psycho ward by the LAPD, and comparisons to Jolie's breakout role in the kitschy gals-in-loony-bin flick *Girl, Interrupted* are distractingly impossible to avoid cross-referencing. Then there are her lips, which literally won't quit. At some points in the film, with its stylistically intended washed-out color (used to evoke all things vintage), Jolie's large, ruby lips appear extra jumbo and reddened, like the bloody moments in the otherwise black-and-white stock of Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima*.

Something about the narrative flow of the film, which would seem contrived if not based in historical, hysterical fact, weaves in and out of plausibility and veracity. (Perhaps because screenwriter J. Michael Straczynski has worked extensively in television.) Whatever the case, *Changeling* valiantly tells its tale with stubborn laconic charm, nicely lined with Eastwood's own simple, melancholic musical score. He knows how to pull us into a world of historical and emotional intrigue, and better than most.