

SEPTEMBER 24-30, 2001

SCENES OF THE CRIME

A Cinerenta, Battle Plan Prods. production. (International sales: TF1 Intl., Boulogne, France). Produced by Marc Frydman, Rod Lurie, Willie Baer, Deborah Lee. Co-producers, Bonnie Weis, James Spies. Executive producers, Mario Ohoven, Kayser.

Directed by Dominique Forma. Screenplay, Dan Golka, Amit Mehta, story by Forma. Camera (color), James Bagdonas; editor, Sid Levin; music, Christopher Young; production designer, Jeff Knipp; set decorator, Kathe Klopp; costume designer, Molly Maginnis; sound designer (Dolby), Steven Hunter Smith; assistant director, David Clure; casting, Mary Jo Slater, Steve Brooksbank. Reviewed at Deauville Film Festival (noncompeting), Sept. 7, 2001. Running time: 96 MIN.

Jimmy Jeff Bridges
 Lenny John Abrahams
 Seth Noah Wyle
 Ray Morris Chestnut
 Carmen Madehen Amick
 Rick Peter Greene
 Steven Bob Gunton
 Trevor Brian Goodman
 Mr. Parker R. Lee Ermey

By LISA NESSELSON

A young grease monkey who sometimes chauffeurs for a mob hit man has a VERY eventful day in "Scenes of the Crime." At its best, tightly wound hostage drama marbled with unpredictable touches plays like "Fail Safe" in the L.A. underworld. The only car chase is in the opening credits, but helmer Dominique Forma shifts gears with alacrity throughout tense and entertaining standoff. Sharply written pic, based in part on a true story and thesped with clean understated strokes, is another deceptively modest winner for Cinerenta, following "The Contender."

Due to get married in just a few days, Lenny (Jon Abrahams) loves cars and admires Steve McQueen's persona in "Bullitt." His fiancée dislikes Len's occasional driving stunts for criminal lowlifes such as Rick (Peter Greene), but Len assures her he's just building up a clientele for

the garage he hopes to open one day.

Rick is observed casing an apartment building next to a deli in a run-down part of town. Cell phone conversations indicate he's to be paid \$250,000 to kill someone.

Len drives Rick to the estate where Jimmy (Jeff Bridges) is enjoying time with his young son before the boy heads to school. Via a clever ruse, Rick gets in and forces Jimmy to accompany him to the van where Len — who hadn't a clue he'd be an accessory to kidnapping — is waiting.

Meanwhile, Trevor (Brian Goodman) has arrived for an early morning meeting at the luxurious home of Jimmy's partner of 15 years, Steven (Bob Gunton), a well-connected politico up to his eyeballs in gentlemanly racketeering. Each man is an extremely powerful no-goodnik operating under a facade of respectability, and their negotiations are a delectable blend of carefully chosen words that will determine the future of millions of dollars and several lives — Jimmy's in particular.

Rick has Len park outside the deli and is preparing to kill Jimmy when Jimmy's bodyguard, Seth (Noah Wyle), arrives out of nowhere and ices Rick. This leaves Len with a leading mobster in his truck.

Allegiances sputter like radio reception in an electrical storm as Len holds Jimmy in the van. With only cell phones and gut instincts to lead the way, the bulk of the pic observes the proceedings as Len puts his faith in the late Rick's boss, Trevor, while Jimmy tries to convince Len he'll be much better off with him and his partner, Steven.

Bridges is supremely assured as a career criminal trying to play chess without a view of the board or the playing pieces. Pumped-up Wyle is suavely menacing as the impossibly cool bodyguard who preempts potential trouble with artful threats and a wad of cash. Abrahams conveys the seeming dead end of his predicament with just the right dose of naive youthful energy. Gunton and Goodman are a delight.

Thoughtfully calibrated editing keeps the elaborate machinations relatively easy to follow without tipping anybody's hand more than the viewer would wish. Tech package is aces.