

entertainment

'Taken' a macho Neeson showcase

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Liam Neeson is a bad, bad man. For the last ten years he's made a career out of playing characters you never want to mess with: he schooled Obi Wan in "Star Wars", made Orlando Bloom less of a girl in "Kingdom of Heaven", and knocked Batman around like a red-headed stepchild in Batman Begins. Finally, Neeson gets to bring his brand of steely cool machismo to a lead role in "Taken". Paris had better watch out.

Bryan Mills, played by Neeson, is a retired CIA agent who just wants to be a part of his 17-year-old daughter's life, after being away for most of it saving the world. This turns out to be harder than he could have expected since his ex-wife, played by Famke Janssen, and her new husband want nothing to do with him. He can do little

more than stand there and watch as his daughter slowly slips away from him and his life speeds toward a dead end. Everything changes when she and her friend visit Paris and are promptly kidnapped by Albanian human traffickers planning to sell them as sex slaves; at this point Mills springs into action and uses his years of CIA training (see: neck breaking and interrogation) to recover his daughter.

At its core, "Taken" has no right to be as good as it is; the story of an ex-CIA agent who travels to Europe to rescue his kidnapped daughter from human traffickers sounds like the plot of a bad direct-to-video Steven Seagal movie. Writer and producer, Luc Besson, once again uses his magic formula to turn

crap into gold and the result is one of the best action thrillers to come out in months. By bringing together a solid cast, top-notch crew, and high production values, Besson overcomes the film's B-movie plot.

Behind the camera is second time director Pierre Morel, the man responsible for the French-language action fest District B13. Unlike his previous movie, Morel actually has a decent script to work with this time and his history as a cinematographer

lends itself to creating a visually gorgeous film; the Parisian landscape is beautifully shot without looking like a tourist brochure. The plot moves along at breakneck pace once Neeson springs into action and there is rarely any downtime.

The performances in the film are generally rock solid with Liam Neeson commanding every scene of the film. He exudes and old-school toughness that would make most action stars green with envy. He effortlessly strides through scenes until it comes time to break some human traffickers in half. While the comparisons to Jason Bourne are inevitable, Neeson's character proves to be far more ruthless. Unlike the slightly goody-two-shoes Bourne, Bryan Mills is prepared to maim, torture and kill anyone he has to in

order to rescue his daughter, and I mean anyone. The fight scenes are fast, efficient and brutal as the 57-year-old takes out his opponents using everything from fists and guns to a fork.

Occasionally these scenes get a little bit chaotic due to the camera work but it's rare that you can't tell what is going on. What really helps to sell the fights, though, is Neeson's dramatic performance. He has a 1970s era tough-guy vibe that would make Clint Eastwood proud and a wry sense of humor that makes him all the more identifiable to the audience. The fact that it has taken this long for him to play a leading role in an action thriller of this caliber is puzzling.

"Taken" is a lean action thrill ride that deserves to be seen. We needed this film last fall when audiences were being assaulted with garbage like "Babylon A.D." and "Bangkok Dangerous". Anyone looking for a good time at the movies need look no further than "Taken".



Photo courtesy of Thevine.com

Rowling furthers the wizarding world

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J.K. Rowling has done it again. She has captivated her audience, and produces yet another master piece, "The Tales of Beedle the Bard", which has had sold 2.6 million copies, and grossed 6.1 million dollars, according to guardian.co.uk. The book has been translated from ancient runes, according the author, by Hermione Granger, and includes commentaries by Albus Dumbledore former headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

The book was first mentioned in the last of the Harry Potter series, the seventh book "Deathly Hallows", in which the lead characters Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley use the tales to help

guide them in their quest to defeat the dark lord Voldemort.

The most prevalent of tales that they used was, "The Tale of the Three Brothers". The tale is about three brother who think they can cheat death. Death, who seems to be smarter than the two oldest brothers, quickly claims them by giving them a gift, which turns upon its users. The youngest, smartest brother seems to realize the cunningness of death and is allowed to live a long life, welcoming death with open arms when the time comes. The three gifts in which death gives, aid Harry Potter along is treacherous

journey.

Most of the tales seem to almost resemble what we as "muggles", or non-magic folk, listened to as children. The themes are mostly of good vs. evil, and dance merrily across the page exciting

both young and old.

This book also allows the reader to take a closer look at the magic world, giving greater insight to the laws and bylaws that the Ministry of Magic places upon the wizarding community.

For instance, the tale of "Babbity Rabbity and Her Crackling Stump", gives the reader a glimpse into what happens when a muggle tries to perform magic and pulls a witch into it. Consequently, the tales also includes the idea of Animagi, the idea of turning oneself into an animal, which has strict rules with the ministry of magic.

"The Tales of Beedle and Bard" can be enjoyed by all ages. The colorful words paint a picture across the page, and give the reader a more in depth look into Harry Potter's world, the world of magic. The concepts are vivid and the morals are clear. But perhaps of all the morals that are told in these tales, the most important is not how far you get in the journey of life, rather it is whom you meet and the impact you have on those around you, that is the most important.

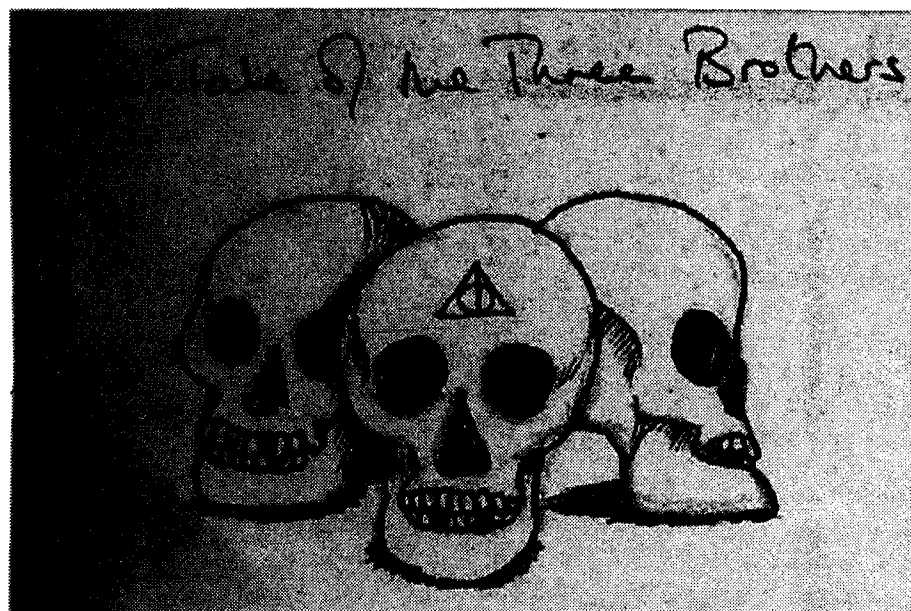


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