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Film Appreciation 1310

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“Direct Hit”

Another movie featuring a corrupt government agency, “Direct Hit” shows us a government paid hit man, Hatch (William Forsythe) is about to retire and must complete one last mission. Although Hatch is to retire, his last mission is to kill an innocent woman, Savannah (Jo Champa), who he befriends and protects. This movie is predominantly about the action. It might have been a better movie if there was more thought put into the other aspects of movie making versus blowing things up.

Editing appears to be a big issue in this movie. The plot itself is not that unique (pretty similar to “Bourne Identity” and “Three Days of the Condor”) and therefore it shouldn’t have been the problem. The settings and themes seemed to be ok as well. But the movie content and the pace were just off at best, and otherwise horrible to the point of hilarity.

The movie opens up with Deets (Eddi Wilde) interviewing himself before a mirror about working with the greatest hit man alive. The mechanics of the scene is obvious to setup some character information about Hatch before actually seeing Hatch. But the way this scene opened up made me feel like the tape needed to be rewound, as if I missed the first minute of the movie. The inside/out editing for this scene was a bit much (it felt jarring due to the fact the movie was just starting), added to it with Deet’s huge ego, and the fact he only lasts a couple minutes in the movie, I think this scene could have been left on the cutting room floor.

There is gratuitous use of slow motion for just about anything that blows up or gets riddled with bullet holes. In most cases, it looks like it was used to “exaggerate effort, fatigue, and frustration.” (Boggs and Petrie, 211) When used appropriately, this is a great effect to show the effort the characters are putting in to escape harm, but in this movie, one bullet blowing up a car, seen in slow motion and seen repeatedly, gets old and cheesy (1980’s vintage cars seem to blow up pretty easily in this movie).

I think this movie could have made better use of editing. It likely could have used more jump cuts, where we see the character at point A and then cut to point B. For example, the scene where Hatch has completed his last mission and is walking the hallways of the Agency. The movie did have some parallel cuts. For example, the car chase scene after the last mission. They show the two cars heading down a busy street and then the camera cuts to another part of the street with two cars stopped in the middle where people are standing (probably due to a car accident). The viewer briefly sees this and then gets the action of the chase scene. Inside/out editing was used for the two cars stopped and initially I was left wondering what I was looking at, which is the goal of the inside/out editing. But once I figured out this was parallel action taking place (due to the parallel cuts), it was obvious where the story was going to go next and there was an explosion waiting to happen. Another editing issue is the pace and time spent on characters in the movie. There seemed to be a lot of screen time for Savannah, to the point it was obviously too much. It appears the goal might have been to make the scenes more dramatic. At the end of a scene, we see Savannah hold a pose and look off screen. The length of these pauses just didn’t feel right in the context of this movie. As reviewer warrenf\_peace said, “Jo Champa plays doey-eyed bimbo Savannah, and the director must have been sleeping with her, considering how much screen time she gets.” (Direct Hit (1994) - IMDb user comments) At the very end of the movie, the last shot is a freeze frame. It seems like the editors had to go with a text book ending: “With the ending of the movement on the screen comes a sense of finality.” (Boggs and Petrie, 213) The timing just felt off and the movie didn’t feel like it deserved a freeze frame to be the last shot. The action leading up to the freeze frame was already pretty tame and there wasn’t much movement involved (Hatch and Savannah kissing and hugging). Then the freeze frame was added and held on screen for a significant amount of time. It ended up being comical versus dramatic.

Scene transitions were also problematic in this movie. At one point we are inside Hatch’s home (grey and dark) and then a slow screen dissolve merges with an inside/out shoot of Savannaha with binoculars outside, in an orangish environment. The two themes didn’t blend well together with this editing technique, in my opinion. There was another scene where we see Hatch has discovered Savannaha looking through his personal belongings. There is a dramatic moment (with matching dramatic music in the background) where Hatch breaks down and admits he didn’t want to kill the people he killed. Savannaha moves in closer to comfort Hatch, and then as if a light switch was flipped, the movie switches from the soft background music to soft rock that clearly was hinting the characters were about to have sex. This abrupt change in mood resulted in audience laughter.

Overall, this movie was somewhat entertaining. It was interesting to note the quality of this movie compared the others seen so far in class. This movie doesn’t hold up in picture quality compared to “Bourne Identity” and even “Three Days of the Condor,” which had better editing and flow than “Direct Hit.” And “Three Days of the Condor” was released nine years before “Direct Hit.” The editing and choice of music seemed to hurt this movie. I think if these were tweaked and improved, this could have been much more enjoyable to watch.

# Bibliography

Boggs, Joseph and Dennis Petrie. The Art of Watching Films. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Direct Hit (1994) - IMDb user comments. 8 December 2007. 26 September 2009 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109630/usercomments>.

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