



Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back (Short Cuts (Wallflower))

By Harvey O'Brien

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Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back is a short, sharp introduction to the cinema of action. Action movies aren't just full of action, they're about action: about responding to threats and traumas with extreme prejudice. Action heroes don't seek out adventure, they respond to dire necessity; frequently with panic, hysteria, and rage. Though they look like hypermasculine ubertexts, action movies reveal the fears and anxieties behind the bluster. In fact that's what most of them are actually about. Harvey O'Brien takes us through the evolution of the action movie as a distinct genre, with an eye for the ethics and aesthetics of 'action movies' not just as a description of content, but a moral argument. He revisits some familiar arguments around gender and violence, but brings a new angle to the debate by not taking first impressions for granted. Films examined in detail include *Death Wish*, *Mad Max 2*, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Last Action Hero*, *The Matrix*, *Kill Bill*, and *The Expendables*: disreputable entertainments that nonetheless tug at the popular imagination for good reasons.

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Editorial Review

Review

This smart, short introduction to the action film tackles the history, aesthetics and politics of an American genre that remains both extraordinarily visible and yet unexplored. It provides readers with a deftly argued account of the genre's distinctive aesthetic and its complex involvement in cultural themes of trauma, violence, and redemption. (Yvonne Tasker, University of East Anglia)

A good source for better understanding action cinema, its evolution, and connection with the real world. (*Film Matters*)

From the Author

I wrote this book because I wanted to read it. It's a piece of scholarship, yes, but I'd like to think that it's readable by anyone that likes action movies and also likes to think. Is that really such a contradiction? I don't think so.

From the Back Cover

Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back is a study of action cinema, exploring the ethics and aesthetics of the genre with reference to its relatively short history. It moves from seminal classics like *Bullitt* (1968) and *Dirty Harry* (1971) through epoch-defining films like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) and *Die Hard* (1988) to revisions, reboots, and renewals in films like *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003), *Taken* (2008), and *The Expendables* (2010). The action genre is a fusion of form and content: a cinema of action about action. It is a cinema of the will, configured as a decisive reaction to untenable circumstances. Action heroes take up arms against the sea of troubles that beset them, safe in the knowledge that if they don't do it, nobody will. Though this makes the action movie profoundly disturbing as an embodiment of moral ideology, its enduring appeal proves the appetite for assurance remains undiminished, even in the wake of 9/11.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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