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CINEMA



John Travolta plays a stealth bomber pilot in charge of transporting two nuclear warheads on a test run. COURTESY PHOTO

'Broken Arrow' offers deft action; lacks deep, interesting storyline

By Damon Houx
 Freelance Reporter

John Woo is the premiere action director. His films understand the kinetic nature of film violence. *Broken Arrow* is no exception.

There is great action in this film. That's about all there is, but it's done with a deft hand and skillful style.

The plot, which is nearly superfluous, revolves around Christian Slater and John Travolta battling it out over who can control the thermo-nuclear devices that Travolta is stealing from the government.

They chase each other all over the Midwest to fight it out in memorable scenes involving a train, in a mine and on hum-vee's.

Delroy Lindo (as a Sergeant type), Bob Gunton (as the rich weasel type) and Frank Whaley (as a junior Detective/government type) are on hand to provide their wares. The perfunctory female, played by Samantha Mathis, is also on hand as a park ranger.

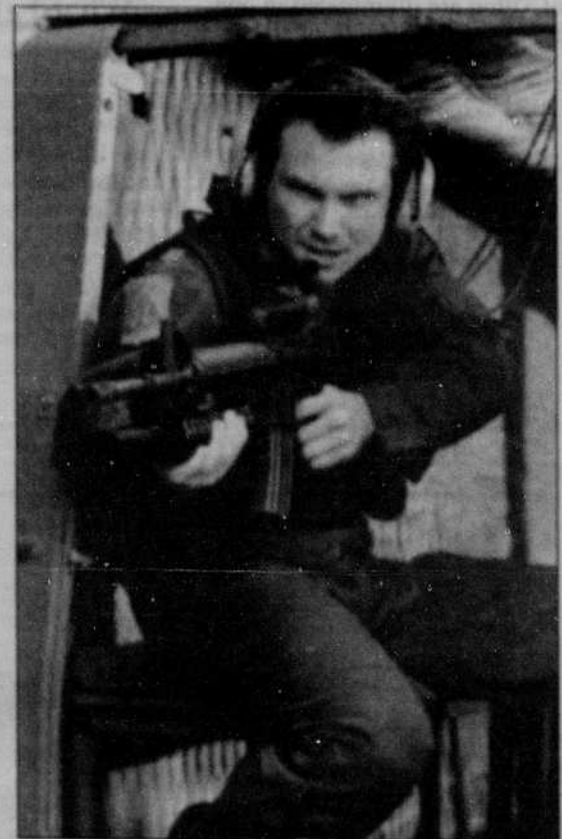
Fortunately, there is no gratuitous sex in the film, which is a nice surprise considering that obligatory sex scenes are usually woven into action films.

Woo, whose past highlights outshine *Broken Arrow*, is an amazing action director. He was based in Hong Kong for twenty years, and he has created a new style of action in the form of Sam Peckinpah and musicals.

His blood opera *The Killer* is one of the best actions films ever and ranks higher than *Broken Arrow*, as do *Hard Boiled*, *Bullet in The Head* and *A Better Tomorrow II* (skip the first one). His first American action film was *Hard Target*, which wasn't too bad, but I'd damn it with faint praise more than anything else.

Broken Arrow is great for action, and the action scenes are well thought out. The movie never lags, and it delivers.

But there's a part of me that wants to knock it for being just that. Though it doesn't make the mistakes of other action films — letting the subplots overwhelm the story or bad pacing — it's soulless. Not *Speed*-like soulless — that is to say, it's not



Christian Slater plays Travolta's colleague who must stop a treacherous nuclear extortion plot. COURTESY PHOTO

manufactured strategically, but it consists only of good action.

What made Woo's blood operas great was their souls. The violence in those films served a purpose and could be as meaningful as exciting.

For *Broken Arrow* to be soulless after so many good films is a disappointment. Woo has proven his craftsmanship, but he seems to have toned down his film making talents for the American market.

Though this doesn't keep *Broken Arrow* from being a good action flick, I can't help but feel disappointed that didn't meet my expectations as far as plot goes.

Still, if you're looking to watch a good no-brainer, this film can't be beat.