



ART OF ACTION: CELEBRATING THE REAL ACTION STARS OF CINEMA

Hard Target

Hard Target

Directed by: John Woo
©: Inc. Universal City Studios
An Alphaville/Renaissance production.
Presented by: Universal Pictures
©: S&R Productions
Executive Producers: Moshe Diamant, Sam Raimi, Robert Tapert
Produced by: James Jacks, Sean Daniel
Co-producers: Terence Chang, Chuck Pfarrer
Line Producer: Daryl Kass
Associate Producer: Eugene Van Varenberg
Unit Production Manager: Daryl Kass
Production Supervisor: Patricia Serafina Madiedo
Accountant: Donald Orlando
Location Manager: Gerrit Folsom
Post-production Supervisor: Doreen A. Dixon
2nd Unit Director: Billy Burton
1st Assistant Director: Dennis Maguire
Script Supervisor: Faith Conroy
Louisiana Casting Consultant: Rick Landry
Written by: Chuck Pfarrer
Director of Photography: Russell Carpenter
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Billy Bragg
Aerial Director of Photography: Frank Holgate
Camera Operators: Michael St. Hilaire, Peter Krause
Steadicam Operators: Randy Nolen, Jeff Mart
Key Grip: Lloyd Moriarity
Still Photographer: Melissa Moseley
Optical Effects Supervisor: Joseph Armand Fedele
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Dale Martin
Film Editor: Bob Murawski
Production Designer: Phil Dagort
Art Director: Philip Messina
Property Master: Steven B. Melton
Construction Co-ordinator: Bill Ballou
Costume Designer: Karyn Wagner
Key Make-up: Anne Hieronymus
Make-up for Jean-Claude Van Damme: Zoltan
Key Hair: Julie Woods
Hair for Jean-Claude Van Damme: Jan Alexander
Titles/Opticals/Digital Composites by: Pacific Title
Negative Cutters: Sandy Brundage, Kevin Henry
Colour Timer: Bill Pine
Music by: Graeme Revell
Featuring: Kodo
Sound Mixer: Al Rizzo, Kenny Delbert
Sound: Al Rizzo, Kenny Delbert
Boom Operators: Skip Godwin, Michael Faba, John Scott
Re-recording Mixers: Rick Alexander, Michael C. Casper, Jim Bolt
Supervising Sound Editors: John Dunn, George Simpson
Dialogue Editor: David A. Whittaker
Special Sound Effects by: John Pospisil
Stunt Co-ordinator: Billy Burton
Stunt Double for Jean-Claude Van Damme: Mark Stefanich
Dialogue Coach: Robert Easton
Armourer: Steven B. Melton
Cast:
Jean-Claude Van Damme (*Chance Boudreaux*)
Lance Henriksen (*Emil Fouchon*)
Yancy Butler (*Natasha 'Nat' Binder*)
Arnold Vosloo (*Pik Van Cleaf*)
Kasi Lemmons (*Carmine Mitchell*)
Wilford Brimley (*uncle Douvee*)
Chuck Pfarrer (*Douglas Binder*)
Bob Apisa (*Mr Lopacki*)
Lenore Banks (*Marie*)

+ intro by Ti Singh, BFI FAN season producer (Wednesday 27 November only)

John Woo's first US film paired him with the 'muscles from Brussels', Belgian action star Jean-Claude Van Damme, whose flamboyant and balletic fighting style perfectly suited the filmmaker's wildly imaginative approach to action, which never lets up. But there's also a thoughtful plot here, which adds further jeopardy to the firepower and pyrotechnics.

Dick Fiddy, bfi.org.uk

An action-packed remake of Ernest B. Schoedsack's *The Most Dangerous Game*, *Hard Target* was penned by a young screenwriter Chuck Pfarrer, who turned to Hollywood after seven years in the Navy (Yes, I have killed men. I was in combat in Lebanon for nine months'). Two of his screenplays have been turned into films: the eminently forgettable *Navy Seals*, and more importantly Sam Raimi's cult horror film *Darkman*. Pfarrer has 'a deal' at Universal, and one day he received a phone call: 'They said they were running something for me in the screening room... It was *The Killer*. When I came out I said I was convinced, and the next thing I knew I was on a plane to Hong Kong to meet John [Woo]'.

The plot of *Hard Target* is simple, even cartoonish, with a hard-boiled romanticism that must have appealed to John Woo. A young woman Natasha (Yancy Butler) comes to New Orleans to look for her long-lost father. She meets Chance Boudreaux (Van Damme), an unemployed seaman who, needing \$217 to pay his union dues and board the next departing ship, agrees to help her. He uncovers the unpleasant activities of an elegant piece of Euro-trash (Lance Henriksen) and his side-kick, a white South African psycho (Arnold Vosloo), who for a substantial fee hire out homeless war veterans for rich men to hunt down in the swamps. Chance's snooping angers the villains, who set him up as prey for their clients.

The script has pages on nine different colours – one for every draft. Pfarrer is on the set, day in, day out, at hand for the rewrites. 'John knows his stuff. For a writer, it's fantastic. What we're ending up with is much better than what I wrote.' For example, Woo has transformed a chase scene into a stunt never attempted on film before, a head-on collision, almost lyrical in its choreographed violence, between a motorcycle and a car. Yet he keeps on soliciting Pfarrer's advice, with his usual generosity and modesty. As Pfarrer explains. 'Hong Kong and US action films have different rules: an American hero would never use a knife – unless he's taking it away from the bad guy – and if the bad guy is hanging from a cliff, the good guy has to help him.' But Pfarrer is there for another reason too: 'I'm learning at the feet of a master. I'm in line to direct myself. Before I came here and saw John work, I thought I might be ready, but now, I just want to watch him.'

Other changes have been made to suit Van Damme's style. 'We've had to adjust the dialogue for him,' says Pfarrer, 'and we've lost some bits of subtlety. However, he's a very physical actor, who comes alive on the screen and can project emotions without saying a word. Like a young Steve McQueen. And he's more charming than many action stars. He's attractive: he could be a matinee idol.'

Douglas Forsythe Rye (*Frick*)
Michael D. Leinert (*Frack*)
Willie Carpenter (*Elijah Roper*)
Barbara Tasker (*waitress*)
Randy Cheramia (*shop steward*)
Elliott Keener (*Randal Poe*)
Robert Pavlovich (*police detective*)
Marco St. John (*Dr Morton*)
Joe Warfield (*Ismael Zenan*)
Jeanette Kontomitras (*madam*)
Ted Raimi (*man on the street*)
Sven Thorsen (*Stephan*)
Tom Lupo (*Jerome*)
Jules Sylvester (*Peterson*)
David Efron (*Billy Bob*)
USA 1993
97 mins
Digital

ART OF ACTION: CELEBRATING THE REAL ACTION STARS OF CINEMA

Mission: Impossible All-Nighter
Sat 30 Nov 23:00 BFI IMAX

John Woo Focus

Hard Target

Sun 24 Nov 13:00; Wed 27 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by Ti Singh, BFI FAN season producer)

Broken Arrow

Sun 24 Nov 18:10

Face/Off

Mon 25 Nov 20:20

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While a bit corny in the intimate scenes, Van Damme's ponytail looks great when he's flying through the air in slow motion. Hunted by an impressive array of cars and motorcycles, he seeks shelter inside an abandoned sugar mill. A thug follows him. Suddenly, a motorcycle in flames mounted by a leather-clad puppet representing the dead villain bursts through a large window. 'We ran a cable and slid the motorcycle along it,' explains [special effects co-ordinator] Dale Martin. The spectacular stunt was performed only once, but for such scenes Woo runs six or seven cameras simultaneously, offering long takes from different angles that will later be spliced together in an orgy of fire, explosion and motion.

Back on the plantation while the experts are putting the final touches to their pyrotechnics, the motorcycle stuntmen are at work. Henrikson and Vosloo are leading the pack, encircling the shed in which Chance's uncle brews illegal whiskey. A motorcyclist takes off his helmet, revealing the long hair and fine features of a young woman. She's Billy Burton's daughter, raised 'as a tomboy' to do stunts from an early age. 'I did one dangerous thing on this film,' she recalls. 'I had to jump off a bridge with another stuntman into the back of a moving train. To time the jump and make sure we were both going at the same time, we dropped lemons, which fall at the speed of your body.'

Woo talks of martial arts director Zhang Cheh. This is not a subject on which Woo dwells easily, but in 1986 he had said in an interview for the Hong Kong Film Festival catalogue that the man had influenced him 'not so much in his way of portraying violence but his unrestrained way of writing emotions and chivalry. Chinese cinema has always been too low-key. We should be more expressive, put more of ourselves into our films.'

The quote is revealing. The expressionist qualities the west so admires in Woo's films, far from being a given in his culture, are something he has had to fight to introduce. Hence, perhaps, his solitude, his feelings of 'un-Chineseness'. Woo himself is reserved, gentle, almost shy, a man who likes to keep his mystery, his privacy. But shouldn't one expect such paradoxes from someone who may be the best action director in the world, yet confesses he's never fired a gun in his life, or, even better, that he doesn't know how to drive?

Berenice Reynaud, *Sight and Sound*, May 1993

John Woo on 'Hard Target'

I think I will stay in the United States. I know I can work here and make better movies than in Hong Kong. In some ways. I'm not very Chinese. My techniques, my themes, my film language are not traditionally Chinese.

Hard Target is my first American film. It's my chance to gain experience in a totally foreign environment. I need the film to establish myself commercially in Hollywood. But in the future. I'll be writing my own scripts. And people like Quentin Tarantino, who knows my films very well, are writing scripts for me.

The methods of the American crew are not so different from those in Hong Kong, but they are more professional. In Hong Kong the technicians work very hard, we've known each other for a very long time and they really understand what I want, but they were not trained by experience, by going to film school.

I had shot in synch sound only once before, for the Cantonese opera film. It is not difficult at all, because I know this technique very well. In Hong Kong I routinely used several cameras. I shot in the American way. The most difficult thing for me here is to learn how to handle the 'studio politics'. It can be very frustrating at times.

Sight and Sound, May 1993