

Liam Neeson Elevates Above-Average Action Movie 'Taken'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 30, 2009 - 8:20am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Bringing the same screen presence and gravity that he has to more serious roles like those in “Schindler’s List” and “Kinsey,” [Liam Neeson](#) [15] turns the relatively generic “[Taken](#) [16]” into an above-average action movie that should prove a surprising alternative for movie goers looking for a break from Super Bowl coverage this weekend.

The great Neeson plays Bryan Mills, a retired “preventer,” essentially Jack Bauer ten or fifteen years down the road. He’s put his violent days behind him but not forgotten the skills that made him one of the most efficient experts in his very specialized field. In the opening act of “Taken,” Mills is hanging out with friends and taking odd jobs like providing back-stage security for the latest pop starlet.



In Taken, Liam Neeson stars as Bryan Mills, an ex-government operative who has less than four days to find his kidnapped daughter - who has been taken on her first day of vacation in Paris.

Photo credit: Stephanie Branchu/Fox

Bryan has grown a bit distant from his daughter Kim ([Maggie Grace](#) [17]) and his ex-wife Lenore (Famke Janssen), but he’s working on getting back into the life of his only child. Kim decides to travel to Europe to follow U2 with her best friend Amanda (Katie Cassidy) and Bryan reluctantly allows her to go.

Before they're even out of the airport, Kim and Amanda are spotted by accomplices of some of the most evil people in the world, spotters for an Albanian sex ring. Kim and her friend are kidnapped, but not before Kim gets her father on the phone. He hears just enough detail that he knows he can travel to Europe and save his daughter's life. And kill anyone who gets in his way.

Pierre Morel, the director of the very-fun "District B13," knows that "Taken" will only work if the audience doesn't have a chance to ask questions or allow suspension of disbelief to sneak in. Consequently, his film is one of the tautest, most expertly paced action films you'll see all year. At around 90 minutes, "Taken" features not one wasted scene.



Only moments away from being taken by a vicious band of kidnappers, Kim (Maggie Grace) makes an urgent phone call to her father.

Photo credit: Stephanie Branchu/Fox

Some of the dialogue in "Taken" is a little over-the-top, but, honestly, there's not much of it. The second half of the film is about a driven man looking for his daughter. There's not a lot of room for dialogue. It's a testament to the writers - Luc Besson & Robert Mark Kamen - that they don't weigh the film down with cheesy lines or overdone monologues. There's no room for monologues when you're trying to save your daughter's life.

The script is better than average and the director perfectly understands how to pace an action film like this one, but "Taken" would be nothing without Neeson. No offense to fans of Jason Statham, but movies like "Taken" don't often see actors of this caliber in their lead roles and it make a huge difference. He is completely believable, adding an emotional gravity to his character's journey without saying a word.

And he's surprisingly powerful from a physical standpoint. It's shocking to think about after the fact, but I never once doubted that the 56 year-old Neeson could totally kick the ass of everyone on-screen. You won't often see action stars of his age that are this convincing. It will be one of the more underrated performances of the year.

In fact, if there's a complaint about "Taken," and this is *rare* for this typically bloated genre, it's that the film is too short. The ending comes abruptly and I wish the middle act allowed for a bit more character development. There's a fine line between taut and choppy and sometimes "Taken" could have slowed down a bit and made for an ultimately stronger film.

Having said that, I don't think there will be a more surprisingly effective action film for a few months. "Taken" was released in Europe months ago and seemed to be unceremoniously dumped on Super Bowl weekend, a bad choice of release date considering how many action fans are probably going to be watching the big game. All signs pointed to another "January dump," a movie that the studio didn't know how to handle and were just trying to get off their shelf. All signs were wrong.

'Taken' stars Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace, Famke Janssen, Xander Berkeley, Katie Cassidy, and Jon Gries. It was written by Luc Besson & Robert Mark Kamen and directed by Pierre Morel. It opens on January 30th, 2009, and is rated PG-13.



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