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Taken

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Taken

Abstract

This is a review of *Taken* (2008).

Given a tagline of “the time for revenge has come,” viewers of Pierre Morel’s film *Taken*, should have an idea of what to expect. Indeed the film is a gritty montage of a father’s pursuit to retrieve his daughter from kidnappers. What follows is the director’s delineation of good vs. evil and a slew of sympathetic violence. The violence is capable of provoking both the consent of the audience and such comments as this from an IMDB.com review: “Although homicide is wrong, death was never more satisfying to watch.”¹

Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson) is a recently retired government agent. He is also a devoted and well-meaning father, despite the havoc his former career wrecked upon his family. His efforts to redeem himself with his ex-wife (Famke Janssen) and his daughter Kim (Maggie Grace) are awkward and consistently thwarted. Kim and her cousin Amanda, naïvely venture to Paris alone and upon arrival, whilst on the phone with her father, Kim witnesses the kidnapping of Amanda and is soon taken herself. The two become victims of sex trafficking and are destined for a fate of induced drug addiction, prostitution, and ultimately death. Equipped with what little information, Kim was able to provide enough information to her father before her capture. With his unique set of skills, and a merciless determination, Bryan sets off for Paris on a quest to save his daughter.

Taken is a film focused upon the conflict of good vs. evil. Innocence is endangered by evil: it is noted that Bryan’s daughter is “pure,” or a virgin, and

adverse to the wild ways of Amanda. *Taken* leaves no doubt about the immorality of the kidnappers: much of the film is difficult to watch as sex trafficking is a ghastly depravation of humanity. The film also demonstrates the corruption of law enforcement leaving Bryan (a mass murderer) as the only possible savior for the salvation of the innocent girl.

Bryan single-handedly massacres his way to his daughter, executing all in his path for whom had responsibility in the kidnapping. Bryan shoots the wife of a corrupt officer in order to extract information. Before that, Bryan brutally tortures the key kidnapper and after obtaining necessary information, proceeds to fatally electrocute the man. This particular scene is striking in the amount of sympathy that the director manages to produce with the audience for Bryan - audience members at my viewing applauded!

Eventually, because of his merciless means, Bryan is able to save Kim. The pair returns to California safely with Bryan redeemed of his past failures and rewarded by a renewed relationship with his daughter. This is a curious ending. While it is clear that the only possible savior for Kim is the fallen character of Bryan, and the necessary method of salvation is violence - including torture, there still occurs a saturation of sin, or an affective violence. Through his efforts, the savior absorbs the consequences of sin and violence and in a sacrifice, purges the innocent of that violence and impurity by removing it by physically leaving it

behind. Bryan has to shed his own blood, but somehow he is permitted to leave the violence and destruction in Paris and return to California as a hero.

In *Taken*, Bryan by means of murder and torture, rescues numerous girls from the clutches of sex traffickers, and becomes a hero by doing so; the film should thus inspire dialogue and debate concerning the matters of evil and violence. Morel seems to condone a message that violence - no matter to what degree - against evil and evil-doers is entirely justified. Perhaps a parallel may be drawn with the Old Testament Judges and Joshua - figures who are permitted by God to commit otherwise genocidal acts against people posited as entirely evil.

¹ *Taken* (2008/1) (The Internet Movie Database, revised 18 February 2008)
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0936501/> (accessed 18 February 2008).