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# The Real **Action Hero**

## In the Line of Fire

Starring Clint Eastwood Written by Jeff McGuire Directed by Wolfgang Petersen Columbia Pictures

**By Peter Travers** 

HERE IS MUCH to be said for Clint Eastwood's beand of no-bull heroics. Just watch big, bad Arnold Schwarzenegger huff and puff and not blow the box office down as he tries to turn an \$80 million white elephant called Lust Action Hero (teated PG-B) into a Treminator for tykes. It's a pleasure to report that Eastwood is on firm. Reraced action ground with In the Line of Fire. But don't set your hopes too high. We're a long way from the profundities that covered the big guy in Oscar glosy for Unforgiese, Fire is formula stuff that pits Eastwood as Secrets Service agent Frank Horrigan against John Malkovich as assassin Mitch Leary.

The target is the president, who is particularly vulnerable because he's campaigning for re-election. In a series of menacing phone calls, Leary tells Horrigan he's going to shoot the pree right in front of the agent's eyes. That's not gonna happen, says Horrigan in one of those "make my day" Eastwoodsms (mercifully, this one is downplayed). Horrigan is haunted by his failure to take a bullet for President Kennedy 30 years ago. (Since Fire is the first film made with Secret Service cooperation, there's a lot of indigestible government propagand to swallow in Jeff McGuire's bloated script.)

The references to JFK sometimes threaten to overwhelm the lightweight material. A flashback shows Horrigan in



Illustration by EDMUND QUY

ROLLING STONE, AUGUST 5, 1993 - 71



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Dallas with the president and the first lady on the day of the assassination (computer on the day of the assessmanon (computer magic transports Eastwood from Dirty Harry into the Kennedy footage, much in the same way that Paula Abdul joined Cary Grant in those TV commercials). One admires the technical feat without



va). Enstwood s et in "Hero."



ever seeing it as more than a gimmick

That said, In the Line of Fire is often an explosive blend of pounding tension and wisecracking humor. This is formula dished out by experts. Director Wolfgang Petersen, who followed the dandy Dars Bost with the deplorable NeverEnding Story, Enemy Mine and Shattered, shows he can still fry an audience's nerves. Even at That said. In the Line of Fire is often an two hours plus, the film benefits from the deft touch of editor Anne Coates (Lawrence of Arabia), the keen eye of cinema-tographer John Bailey (Silverado) and the ringling sound of composer Ennio Morricone, who scored Eastwood's Fistful of Dollars.

But it's the star, 63, who wins the day Eastwood hasn't had this much fun with a role in years, and his joy is contagious. He plays Horrigan as something out of Jurasic Park, a dinosaur in a field of young technocrats who consider him "a border-line burnout with questionable social skills." Horrigan gets winded running alongside the presidential motorcade, and when he takes a nap in his office, jokesters call the medics, claiming the old warhorse has been felled by a heart attack.

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In one potent sequence, during a campaign speech, Horrigan – feverish from
the flu – is accused of mistaking a bursting balloon for a gunshot. The chief of
staff, played by Feed Dalton Thompson,
orders him off the field for humiliating the

president. Nothing galls Horrigan like a bureaucrat. And don't even talk to this bureaucrat. And don't even task to this cranky, rumpled throwback about new-fangled procedures. Though he appreci-ares the long legs of agent Lily Raines, smartly played by Rene Russo, he can't resist teasing her for taking what he con-

siders a man's job. At a staff meeting he tells her that panache (Leary used the word in a phone call) means
"flamboyance." "I knew
that," says Raines,
defensively. "Oh, really," says Horrigan with
a wicked twinkle. "I had to look it up." Before long, Hor-

rigan is wooing Raines by playing jazz piano — he once did a duet with Nixon on "Moon-Nixon on "Moon-glow." He kisses her hard in an elevator and later, in bed, tries to get his and her clothes before she is called back on the job. The relationship is wholly improbable, but Eastwood and Russo get such a kick out of their sexual sparring that complaints seem down-right churlish.

The humor grows malignant in Horri-

gan's phone conversa-tions with Leary, who taunts the agent about his failure with Kennedy and reminds him of how guilt turned Florrigan to alcohol and ruined his marriage. Leary, a master of disguise, is an evil charmer who can wheedle his way into the house of two single women and break their necks without breaking a sweat. Malkovich is venomously funny and scary enough to freeze the blood. Leary says he and Horrigan have both been betrayed by the govern-ment. Without giving away Leary's secret, the maniac does have a legitimate gripe. For a while the story takes a promising

turn into the dark waters of Tightrope, a landmark 1984 film directed by Richard Tuggle, in which Eastwood's character is linked to the sex killer he's tracking. But the script doesn't have the heft to tackle moral ambiguity. Petersen compensates by intensifying the suspense as Horrigan and Leary face off in a hotel where the is speaking, letting the film get down to the entertaining business of good, old-fashioned bang-bang. At its best, Fire is terrifically exciting — the kind of lean, mean Eastwood fare that shames the mean castwood fare that shames the overblown antics of Schwarzenegger, Stallone and the other pees bad boys. Clint is the class act of summer-movie heroes. He laces his action with dry wit and serves it up straight with a twist of sex-ual swagger. Now that's muscle.

#### The Firm

OR ALL THE MONEY and talent OR ALL THE MONEY and calent lavished on filming The Firm, the best seller by former lawyer John Grisham, you can't help feeling let down. The book moved at turbo speed. At two and a half hours, the movie crawls, even with Tom Cruise as Mitch McDeere, the Harvard Law grad-uate who learns that the classy Memphis, uate who learns that the classy Memphis, Tenn., firm he's joined is a front for the mob. Director Sydney Pollack zapped out a taut thriller in Three Days of the Condor. But The Firm is mostly flab, in the manner of Pollack's elephantine Hamma. With a director of Pollack's gifts (They Shoot Horses, Dan't They?, Tootsie), one tends to make excuses. Maybe he wanted to bring taste, introspection and charac-serization to what was essentially a quick. terization to what was essentially a quick read. If so, it was a miscalculation.

Grisham had fun with his story; Pollack treats it like scripture. The early

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#### FREE WILLY

After a parade of grating kid flicks, led by Dennis the Menace, Rookie of the Year and Pauly Shore's adult-themed but infantile Son-in-Law, the crowd-pleasing

Free Willy plays on the emo-tions with welcome subtlety and humor. The story is built on the friendship between Jesse, a bad-ass foster child (Ja-son James Richter), and Willy, a moody killer whale captured by theme-park owners and forced to do tricks for tourists. Jesse's

attempt to return Willy to his family at sea expresses his own longings for the mother who abandoned him. But don't be put off. The film provides the same laugh-cry-cheer kick you got from E.T.

#### UN COEUR EN HIVER

Claude Sauter's coolly fascinating love story is ideal for a hot summer night. A violinist (gorgeous Emmanuelle Béart) falls for a violin maker (Daniel Auteuil)

who can't thaw out his feelings and make the first move. Auteuil gives a great performance in a haunting, hypnotic film.

### JACQUOT

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Agnès Varda directed this

Agnes varia directed this heart-piercing film, based on the impoverished but joy-filled child-hood of her husband, director Jacques Demy (The Umbrellas of Cherbourg, Lola), who died during production. It not only evokes his art but serves as a tender tribute to a great screen romantic.