



ART OF ACTION: CELEBRATING THE REAL ACTION STARS OF CINEMA

Face/Off

Face/Off

Director: John Woo

Production Companies:

Paramount Pictures, Douglas-Reuther Productions, WCG Entertainment

Executive Producers: Michael Douglas, Steven Reuther, Jonathan D. Krane

Producers: David Permut, Barrie M. Osborne, Terence Chang, Christopher Godsick

Screenplay: Mike Werb, Michael Colleary

Director of Photography: Oliver Wood

Editors: Christian Wagner, Steven Kemper

Production Designer: Neil Spisak

Costume Designer: Ellen Mirojnick

Music: John Powell

Production Sound Mixer: David Ronne

Stunt Co-ordinator: Brian Smrz

Assistant Stunt Co-ordinator: Gregg Smrz

Cast:

John Travolta (*Sean Archer*)

Nicolas Cage (*Castor Troy*)

Joan Allen (*Eve Archer*)

Alessandro Nivola (*Pollux Troy*)

Gina Gershon (*Sasha Hassler*)

Dominique Swain (*Jamie Archie*)

Nick Cassavetes (*Dietrich Hassler*)

Harve Presnell (*Victor Lazarro*)

Colm Feore (*Dr Malcolm Walsh*)

John Carroll Lynch (*prison guard Walton*)

C.C.H. Pounder (*Hollis Miller*)

Robert Wisdom (*Tito Biondi*)

Margaret Cho (*Wanda*)

Jamie Denton (*Buzz*)

Matt Ross (*Loomis*)

Chris Bauer (*Dubov*)

Myles Jeffrey (*Michael Archer*)

David McCurley (*Adam Hassler*)

Thomas Jane (*Burke Hicks*)

Tommy J. Flanagan (*Leo*)

Dana Smith (*Lars*)

Romy Walthall (*Kimberly*)

Paul Hipp (*Fitch*)

Kirk Baltz (*Aldo*)

Lauren Sinclair (*Agent Winters*)

Ben Reed (*pilot*)

Lisa Boyle (*Cindee*)

Linda Hoffman (*Livia*)

Danny Masterson (*Karl*)

Father Michael Rocha (*priest*)

Megan Paul (*hospital girl*)

Mike Werb (*hospital dad*)

Tom Reynolds (*LAPD cop*)

Steve Hytner (*interrogating agent*)

Carmen Thomas (*Valerie, reporter*)

John Bloom (*prison medical technician*)

Walter Scott (*port police commander*)

Brooke Leslie (*ER nurse*)

Cam Brainard (*dispatcher*)

David Warshofsky (*bomb leader*)

John Neidlinger, Norm Compton

(*bomb technicians*)

Gregg Shawzin (*lock down guard*)

Clifford Einstein (*restorative surgeon*)

Marco Kyrus (*recreation guard*)

Tom Fridley (*prison guard*)

Andrew Wallace (*altar boy*)

Jacinto Rodriguez (*prisoner*)

Chic Daniel (*FBI squad leader*)

Laurence Walsh (*Walsh clinical nurse*)

USA 1997

140 mins

35mm

The original tagline of John Woo's outlandish, high-octane masterpiece read, 'In order to trap him, he must become him'. That doesn't come close to capturing the full insanity of this film, which sees John Travolta's FBI Special Agent Sean Archer going under the knife to acquire the likeness of Nicolas Cage's mega-villain Castor Troy in order to stop an attack on LA. Unsurprisingly, things don't go to plan. Travolta and Cage are a riot in their performance-swapping roles, while Woo delivers one of action cinema's best climactic chases.

Kimberley Sheehan, bfi.org.uk

In John Woo's most fully realised English-language film to date, two characters literally become their own worst enemies. The movie propels itself on this role-switching gimmick and on Woo's trademark excess. It's a star vehicle, a tenderly executed acting exercise, and a bone-crunching, hilarity-inducing example of what fans hoped would happen when the Hong Kong director's cartoon pyrotechnics collided with Hollywood production values and matching budgets.

A sci-fi film wrapped around a Shakespearean romantic comedy of assumed identities and exchanged lovers, *Face/Off* turns Woo into the ultimate crowd-pleaser, which, in this case, is not a bad thing. In sci-fi, medical experiments gone wrong lead to violence. In romantic comedy, mistaken identities resolve with domestic stasis. Here, we get both, and the result is as suspenseful as it is liberating. Can a person right his *doppelgänger's* wrongs? It appears so. The script requires that its stars John Travolta and Nicolas Cage take over each other's roles, which they do, gleefully sending up each other's mannerisms. More importantly, the ensuing confusion leads to transformation and redemption for each man: as Archer, Castor makes the FBI drone care about his life. As Castor, Archer makes amends for the terrorist's actions.

Like Woo's Hong Kong work – as well as his two earlier English-language films *Hard Target* and *Broken Arrow* – *Face/Off* is punctuated with gravity-teasing acrobatics, comic mayhem, and mindboggling sentimentality, which somehow manage not to cancel each other out. Cheeky scenes occasionally mock the outré nonsensicalness of it all ('It's like looking in a mirror, only not,' says Travolta at one point). In one scene, a gun battle seethes around a little boy whose stereo headset is playing 'Over the Rainbow' while the grown-ups around him shoot it out in slow motion. In another, an actor announces the movie's theme – 'good versus evil' – after parodying the posture of Christ on the Cross.

The secret of Woo's appeal is that he takes all the familiar clichés and throws them back at us. Not only does he use, without an ounce of compunction, the hackneyed plot device of a lawman out for revenge against a villain who killed his son, but he stages this murder, in a breathtaking sepia-and-slow-motion style, on a merry-go-round, complete with sad calliope music. Trite, yes, but so over-the-top trite it makes a statement.

Woo seems determined to prove that any plot event can be turned into a flaming inferno, as in the overextended finale in which every piece of wood in an LA harbour, drenched or not, seems transmuted into a stick of self-combusting dynamite. With his dark, Deco-futuristic sets and set-pieces, Woo quotes from such sci-fi classics as *Metropolis* (1926) and lesser-known works

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John Wick All-Nighter

Sat 9 Nov 22:00 BFI IMAX

Stunt Saturday

Sat 16 Nov 11:00

The Stunt Man

Sat 16 Nov 17:50

The Art of the Action Trailer

Sun 17 Nov 13:50

Mission: Impossible All-Nighter

Sat 30 Nov 23:00 BFI IMAX

John Woo Focus

Red Cliff Chi bi

Mon 11 Nov 17:40

Red Cliff II Chi bi: Jue zhan tian xia

Tue 19 Nov 17:55

Face/Off

Sat 9 Nov 17:30; Mon 25 Nov 20:20

Broken Arrow

Thu 14 Nov 20:40; Sun 24 Nov 18:10

Hard Target

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

Bollywood

Main Hoon Na

Sat 23 Nov 14:30 (+ intro by BFI Product Manager Zenobia Bharmal)

Dhoom: 2

Sun 24 Nov 14:50

RRR

Sat 30 Nov 14:40

Woman Kings

Polite Society + Q&A with director Nida Manzoor

Sun 17 Nov 18:00

Coffy

Thu 21 Nov 20:45

The Long Kiss Goodnight

Fri 22 Nov 20:35

Yes, Madam! Huang jia shi jie

Sat 23 Nov 18:30

Executioners Yin doi hou hap zyun

Sat 23 Nov 20:45

Run Lola Run Lola rennt

Tue 26 Nov 20:50

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

Fri 29 Nov 20:20

The Woman King

Sat 30 Nov 20:10

Big Screen Classics: The History of Action

Seven Samurai Shichinin no samurai

Sun 10 Nov 11:45; Sun 24 Nov 14:30

Goldfinger 60th anniversary screenings

Sun 10 Nov 18:40; Sat 23 Nov 18:20

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Wo hu cang long

Mon 11 Nov 18:00; Wed 27 Nov 18:10 (+ intro)

like *Seconds* (a 1966 film in which men bored with their lives elect to have a face-swap) as well as, with its hall-of-mirrors shootout, such noir dramas as *Lady from Shanghai* (1948). Woo drops in these allusions not just to show off but because he knows we also love the spot-the-influence game. Indeed, *Face/Off* is, at heart, a high-budget B-movie with great B-movie moments. One of the finest is when Archer, residing in Troy's body and confined to an Orwellian hellhole of a prison, learns that Troy has escaped and is impersonating him. Our hope for his salvation sinks even lower than his below-floor-level prison cell.

Face/Off's screenplay, originally written for Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, leaves plenty of room for hamming it up. But it also contains the magic that works the spell that unravels a world in which one man inhabits another's body. It helps that Cage and Travolta seem like separate ends of a large blob of taffy – a tug on one end affects the other. What's amazing is that on such a big canvas, both Travolta and Cage set down their small moments with delicate strokes. 'I'm Castor Troy,' yelps Archer as he tentatively tries out his new identity. Then louder: 'I'm Castor Troy.' We watch him go through a baptism of fire and come out laughing all the way.

Robin Dougherty, *Sight and Sound*, November 1997

Battleship Potemkin Bronenosets Potyomkin

Tue 12 Nov 14:30

Enter the Dragon

Wed 13 Nov 18:10 (+ intro by film critic Katie

Smith-Wong); Mon 18 Nov 14:30

Hell Drivers

Thu 14 Nov 12:20; Sat 16 Nov 20:40

Three the Hard Way

Sun 17 Nov 16:10

Police Story Ging chaat goo si

Tue 19 Nov 20:55; Thu 28 Nov 18:20

Bullitt

Thu 21 Nov 14:30; Tue 26 Nov 20:45

Taxi

Fri 22 Nov 18:20; Mon 25 Nov 20:50

The Mark of Zorro

Sat 23 Nov 15:00

Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior

Wed 27 Nov 20:50

District B13 Banlieue 13

Fri 29 Nov 20:45

Safety Last! + One Week

Sat 30 Nov

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