

Jagged film undermines Hitchcockian pretense

By PATRICK GUNTENSBERGER
and JOHN MCLEAN

Richard Marquand's new thriller, *Jagged Edge*, is a film that shoots for Alfred Hitchcock psycho-drama and succeeds in approaching the level of an episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

The story revolves around the trial of Jack Forrester, played by Jeff Bridges, a man accused of the particularly brutal murder of his wealthy wife. Glenn Close plays Teddy Barnes, the reluctant attorney who defends Forrester under the

condition that she is convinced of his innocence. The tension in the plot is a result of the repeated and rapid switches in this conviction by both Barnes and the viewer. Barnes' personal involvement with Forrester contributes to her waning objectivity and serves to make the question of his innocence even more pressing.

Although the plot outline is fine, there are script problems; the story is trite. Essentially a courtroom drama, *Jagged Edge* depends upon startling revelations and the appearance of surprise witnesses with surprise testimony. These appear with



Glenn Close and Jeff Bridges perform well in erratic courtroom drama.

monotonous predictability and each one of these surprises swings the viewers' belief in Forrester's guilt or innocence handily back and forth. Each startling revelation is logically appropriate to the progress of the plot; although the tension mounts, one can't help but appreciate the neatness of the sea-saw trick that is constantly repeated.

As for the direction, one does not need to be browbeaten to be convinced that these startling revelations are indeed intended to be startling. Time after time we are treated to excruciatingly long and repeated pauses while a witness holds his breath before spilling what's on his mind. To emphasize this, the camera moves in for a close-up every time.

Jeff Bridges is as engaging and competent as ever (has he ever turned in a bad performance?)? Glenn Close, however, has a struggle. She has to make believable a character who smokes (one cigarette), drinks beer (one can), is single-handedly raising two children

(of the traditionally precocious variety), while carrying on a high-powered career. To help her along she is given scenes where she has to break down and cry and generally demonstrate that typical feminine weakness that will make it all acceptable. The result is demeaning.

The camera and editing also present problems. In the first third of the film particularly, the camera is aggressively restless. There are handheld shots, tracking shots, tilts, dollies and pans for no fathomable reason. Finally, when one thinks that things might just have settled down, we are bushwhacked by erratic editing. Unbelievably long close-ups eliciting laughter from the audience) are followed by a series of quick shots and then succeeded by totally static scenes.

Jagged Edge has all the ingredients for a superior thriller but unfortunately excessive abuse of certain elements destroys its potential. Save five dollars and wait for the video.

Schwarzenegger blows 'em away in stupid but funny film

By PATRICK GUNTENSBERGER
and JOHN MCLEAN

Anybody who roots for the coyote over the roadrunner will love Mark Lester's *Commando*. The much talked about violence in this film is just like a cartoon. Put your critical faculties, indeed your mind, on hold and go see Arnold Schwarzenegger blow up stuff.

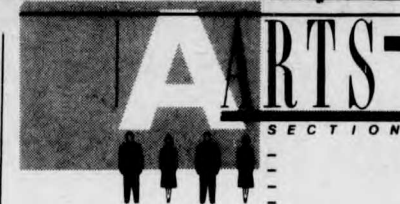
The excuse for a plot involves Schwarzenegger as Colonel John Matrix, whose beloved daughter is kidnapped in an effort to blackmail him into overthrowing the government of a fictitious banana republic. Colonel Matrix, showing his better judgement, won't accede to the demands of the extortionists and goes after the kidnappers instead. That, in short, is the storyline.

This is not *Rambo*, this is not *Invasion USA*; this film does not try to justify its violence on the basis of some demographically popular

right-wing philosophy. What we're dealing with is screwball comedy with hardball violence.

Commando is not a blood and guts film. The violence, though extreme, is essentially antiseptic. Arnie blows up, blows away, and kills more people than watch the Jays play in the month of August. But none of it means anything. There are no lingering shots of bleeding corpses; there isn't time. The action is played for impact. The dialogue, what there is of it, is a kind of James Bond throw-away humor. In fact, the whole film is a self-parody, a parody of the action-adventure genre. There are constant references to Schwarzenegger's previous films, James Bond pictures and action movies of every description from Matt Helm to Bruce Lee.

Rae Dawn Chong, playing "Cindy," comes across like any of Frank Capra's scatterbrained heroines. Her dialogue, with the taci-



WHAT'S IN A PICTURE? Filler, folks. Rugged Arnold clutches his... umm—source of power.

turn Schwarzenegger, is one of the exhilarating aspects of *Commando*.

Schwarzenegger is the perfect human terminator; he doesn't act, he reacts. Coming from the Clint Eastwood two-expression school of performing arts, he clearly does a good many of the stunts required by the role. The fight scenes particularly are remarkably well done. They are tough, mean and realistic.

Before this turns into a rave, let us just say that the movie succeeds because it does what it sets out to do. It's stupid. Go see it; you'll have fun.

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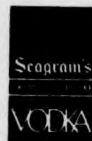
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