Under Siege relies on violence rather than substance

Under Siege is a poorly written film in which the violent action sequences provide the only substance. Steven Seagal's martial arts scenes are impressive and Tommy Lee Jones gives a compelling portrayal of his character, but these alone do not redeem the film.

Seagal is Casey Ryback, a former Navy SEAL and combat operative in Vietnam, the Middle East, and Panama. In Under Siege he is the cook on the Navy's most powerful battleship, the USS Missouri, as it sails across the Pacific with a skeleton crew before being decommissioned. Mid-voyage, a group of hijackers led by William Strannix (Tommy Lee Jones) and Commander Krill (Gary Busey) disguised as entertainers and caterers for the Captain's birthday party take over the ship. Their plan is to steal the Missouri's nuclear arsenal. Ryback must nearly single-handedly take on the group and save the nuclear weapons from falling into the wrong hands.

This backhanded plot is not developed in any vaguely interesting ways. The "good guys" and the "bad guys" are established immediately and the story merely becomes a test of who can eliminate the other first. The sole narrative action is Ryback wandering around the ship trying to come up with as many new and creative ways as possible to kill off the bad guys. There are powerful sequences or crafted schemes. The scenes in which Ryback communicates with the Pentagon's Crisis Action Center are a nice break, though the amount of faith the Pentagon puts in Ryback is rather unbelievable.

The few action sequences that portray Seagal's mastery of martial arts are a treat to watch, however. Seagal was the first non-Asian to establish a martial arts academy in the United States, and his skills are nicely showcased in the few scenes that call for them. Still, the action of this movie comprises too much shooting and not enough finesse.

The biggest failing of this film is the lead performance. The weak writing to the mostly gratuitous violence, the weak acting, the unconvincing narrative action, and the over-reliance on martial arts sequences make Under Siege a poorly written film in which the violent action sequences provide the only substance.

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THE ARTS

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Directed by Andrew Davis.

Written by J.P. Lawton.

Starring Steven Seagal and Tommy Lee Jones.

Los Angeles

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