

DVD Select: Murder, mayhem and leaving town: another Coenesque moment

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Just what the heck kind of a movie is "No Country for Old Men" (Miramax/Paramount Vantage, 4 stars)? A Western? Gangster movie? Chase movie? Bloody road-trip flick?

"I'd say it's a road movie ..." suggests the laconic Tommy Lee Jones, who plays the aging Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, a proud and wise lawman who feels more and more that this blood-drenched West Texas terrain is no longer home for him.

'NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN' - Tommy Lee Jones plays Sheriff Ed Tom Bell in the Coen brothers Oscar-winning drama 'No Country for Old Men.' CNS Photo courtesy of Richard Foreman. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin Jones is being interviewed on the DVD extra features for the quadruple Oscar-winning film by brothers Ethan and Joel Coen, from the novel by Cormac McCarthy. (Those Oscars: Best Director, Best Picture, Supporting Actor to Javier Bardem and Adapted Screenplay.)

But wait. Tommy Lee's not done. (I told you he's laconic.)

"... or a horror movie," he continues. "A lot of killing goes on."

He pauses. The feature moves on to something else, then cuts back to Jones: "There's a good deal of humor in it, so you could call it a comedy."

He pauses again, etc.

"I'd call it a horror-comedy-chase."

The sparkling Irish colleen Kelly Macdonald, who plays the sweetly dumb Carla Jean Moss, is edited into the scene: "I think it's a Coen brothers movie," she offers. "They're their own genre."

I'm down with that. You are either on board a Coen movie, or you're not. On my desk, I have two snow globes from the Coen movie "Fargo." One shows Frances McDormand kneeling in the snow. The second shows the infamous ghastly wood-chipper scene. It doesn't matter which one is picked up, people either say "I love Fargo" or "I hate Fargo."

With "No Country For Old Men," the Coens seem to have moved a whole lot more people into the "love" column.

The movie's events are precipitated by a drug deal gone bad. Really bad.

A rugged Marlboro Man by name of Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) happens upon the aftermath while out

hunting game. About a half-dozen pickup trucks are parked in a remote wash. Scattered about are sun-bloated and blood-drained bodies. Somebody lost faith with somebody and the shooting didn't stop until nobody was left standing.

Llewelyn is no dummy. If there are this many drugs and gunslingers, there must be a pile of money somewhere. He follows a blood trail to the one tree for miles and the corpse warily eyeing the satchel filled with \$2 million in cash.

Of all the choices Llewelyn could have made, he took the most fateful - and fatal. He took the money and ran.

"If I don't come back, tell my mother I love her," Llewelyn grimly tells his wife Carla Jean (Macdonald).

"Your mother's dead," drawls Carla Jean.

Without missing a beat Llewelyn shoots back, "Then I'll tell her myself."

He's soon pursued - relentlessly - by the most enigmatic and ruthless killer to ever blast his way through a movie, Anton "Sugar" Chigurh (Javier Bardem). Sugar kills and kills and kills and never betrays a hint of pleasure or remorse.

As fast and far as Llewelyn runs, he can never escape Sugar. And Llewelyn is good, two tours in 'Nam good. He knows survival.

Playing cleanup, in the role of the Great Tsk-tsker, is Sheriff Bell. He's ever aware of the horrible unfoldings but always a step behind.

As a deputy looks over the busted drug-deal scene, long after Llewelyn and Sugar have begun their cat-and-mouse game, he observes, "It's a mess, ain't it sheriff?"

"If it ain't," replies Bell, "it'll do 'til the mess gets here."

See, there isn't much that Bell hasn't seen as a West Texas sheriff. But he's all too aware that "the mess" is moving up to a whole new level that he isn't equipped nor inclined to enter. It's game-over when this mess plays out for Sheriff Bell.

Admittedly, the audience is about ready to retire from sheer exhaustion at the end of "No Country For Old Men." The killing is relentless albeit brilliantly conceived.

Right up until the end.

In the end you find out that life is truly random and not without a grim sort of irony.

Still don't know what to make of that ending. Lots of folks don't. But I'll give the Coens their due: It ends just exactly the way they wanted it to end and if you don't like it, well, "Enchanted" comes out on DVD in a couple of weeks.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Dan in Real Life" (Touchstone, 3 stars) In this heartbreaking romantic comedy, Dan Burns (Steve Carell in his best film role to date) is a widowed father of three maturing daughters who writes a much-read column on raising children. His column is full of wisdom, much of which he does not follow. "You're a good father but sometimes a bad dad," says his fourth grader. The oldest wants to drive; he won't let her. The 16-year-old wants to date and fall in love; he won't let her.

While attending the annual reunion at the family summer home in Rhode Island, Dan meets and falls for an intriguing French woman in a book and bait store. Marie (Juliette Binoche) is friendly enough, even though she demurs, having just begun a relationship.

The relationship happens to be with Dan's kid brother, Mitch (Dane Cook). Imagine Dan's shock. Imagine Marie's shock. Imagine Mitch's ... well, they don't quite get around to telling Mitch that they met, as innocent as it all might have been. The secret, which gnaws at Dan and makes him go hilariously Carell-crazy, fuels the rest of the movie.

The cast also includes Dianne Wiest and John Mahoney as the Golden Pond-esque matriarch and patriarch. Look for Oscar-nominated ("Gone Baby Gone") Amy Ryan in a cameo as Dan's sister-in-law.

The DVD extras are mostly a Valentine to director Peter Hedges ("Pieces of April"), who clearly has the affection of his cast and crew. Says Hedges, aptly of this film, "All comedy, that I know, is tempered by pain and sadness."

Also this week:

- "August Rush" An orphaned musical prodigy (Freddie Highmore) is drawn to New York City where he is cared for by a mysterious stranger (Robin Williams) as he seeks clues to the fate of his parents (Keri Russell and Jonathan Rhys Meyers). Enjoy it as a fairy tale.

- "Outlaw" Rough guys Sean Bean and Bob Hoskins unite to bring order to London's streets, vigilante-style.

- "Nancy Drew" Beloved you-go-girl detective from the serial novels comes to the big screen. Here, Drew (Emma Roberts) takes on the case of the dead movie star in Hollywood.

- "Bachelor Party 2" Cast includes many emerging actors who will regret having their name attached to this for the rest of their brief careers.

- "Sleuth" In 1972, Michael Caine and Sir Laurence Olivier went head-to-head in this deadly game of wits. For this remake, Caine takes on Olivier's role as the aging novelist and Jude Law becomes the young upstart having an affair with his wife. Harold Pinter rewrote the script and Kenneth Branagh directs.

- "Hitman" From the X-Box to your DVD player, another game conversion. This one stars Timothy Olyphant as Agent 47, no past, no future, superb killing skills. Also stars Ukrainian lingerie model Olga Kurylenko who can be seen in the next James Bond movie, "Quantum of Solace," this fall.

IT CAME FROM TV

Let's flip through the dial, shall we? On your TV tonight, Comedy Central sews together three episodes from 2007 in "South Park: Imaginationland" - the usual hilariously poor taste of Trey Parker and Matt Stone.

Click: Season one, volume two of the 1969 series "Love American Style"; season one, volume two of 1969's hip action trio "The Mod Squad"; season one of the political satire "Lil' Bush: Resident of the United States"; "Stargate: The Ark of Truth," a direct-to-video follow-up to the long-running series "Stargate SG-1"; travel afar with Michael Palin's "New Europe"; Animal Planet's "The Most Extreme" season one; and the first season of MTV's sketch comedy series "Human Giant."

FROM THE VAULTS

"Gattaca" This sci-fi favorite becomes more relevant as genetic identification becomes more prevalent. Ethan Hawke is a determined young man who happens to be born with a heart condition, and thus genetically and socially inferior. The genetically sound but emotionally unstable Jerome (Jude Law) helps him mask his identity and enter the elite astronaut corps. Co-stars Uma Thurman. New features and a digitally refurbished film highlight this re-issue from 1997.

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