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# 'Punisher' reprimanded



**"The Punisher" on DVD**  
**Starring Tom Jane and John Travolta**  
**Lion's Gate Films**



**ROBERT SAUCEDO**  
REVIEWER

"The Punisher" was made for a specific audience: The same audience that enjoys monster truck rallies, beer commercials and movies like "Bloodsport." It's for people who don't give a Jean-Claude Van Damme if the movie features a believable character arc or if the plot's logic is hung out to dry while the

camera is rolling. "The Punisher" is the perfect movie for plopping yourself in front of on a Saturday afternoon while your brain takes a temporary vacation.

The problem is that the movie could have been so much more.

Based on a Marvel superhero originally created 20 years ago as a bad guy for Spider-Man to rough around, "The Punisher" tells the story of Frank Castle, an FBI agent who has his family brutally gunned down after taking out a vengeful crime boss' son. Seeking revenge ("No, not revenge ... punishment"), Castle dons a semi-costume and takes to the mean streets of Tampa (sarcasm alert) to clean house.

A simple story of revenge, "The Punisher" is a fitting reflection of the comic book character's mental state, a schizophrenic tornado of a film that can't decide if it wants to be gritty realistic or darkly comic. The film tries its hand at a variety of tones, never finding one that completely fits.

Scenes where Tampa's leading crime boss (John Travolta in one of his patented villain roles) reacts to his son's death attempt to be realistic and sympathetic, but instead come off as cold and flat. Then we have scenes in which Castle battles with a hulking Russian in a horribly cartoonish battle that would make Wile E. Coyote wince.

The comic scenes make the film memorable and the aforementioned Russian rumble and a scene in which Castle tortures an informant with a Popsicle and a steak speak of a potential to be something different in the straight-to-video days of Steven Segal and company. If

the film wished to focus instead on a gritty take on revenge, the character of is one of Comidom's greatest sources tapped mental pathos; a character bordering the edge of insanity.

Instead, the film struggles to reach a stumbles down the rough side of Mt. St. A collage of shots and scenes ripped from films, "The Punisher" perfectly displays Jonathan Hensleigh's skill at being a

The acting is perhaps the worst part of the film. Thomas Jane struggles to convey tortured pathos of Castle, but looks as if he ingested a half-pound of Taco Bell and find a bathroom. John Travolta phones in a performance of a potentially sympathetic. When the audience is asked to empathize with Travolta's motivation behind the assassination of the Castle clan, there is not enough in the film to warrant any. When the film portrays the scary bad guy, he can't break out his likable charisma and audience members instead be expecting him to break out at any moment.

One of the few memorable aspects of the film is the great trio of actors who play Castle's fellow tenement dwellers. A pair of misfits and Rebecca Romijn-Stamos (who way is convincing as an incredibly sexy woman who just happens to be living in the slums of Tampa) add lightness to the constipated of the film.

In one of the documentaries on the DVD, producer claims that "The Punisher" is the film to shoot in Tampa. There is a reason that. It's hard to believe anybody would be downtown Tampa dressed in a black trench without dying of a heat stroke.

The main draw to the DVD is a prequel book by the creative team of Garth Ennis, Steve Dillon, who reinvigorated the hero in recent past. On the DVD, there is the usual of extras who are actually more than the sum of their parts. There are two information-packed documentaries about the making of the film: "Keep It Real: The Punisher Stunts" and "War Zone."

Also included are two featurettes focusing on the origins of the characters. "Drawing Blood" is a short interview with Tim Bradstreet, uber-talented cover artist of the comic series and genius behind the theatrical posters. There is also a commentary by the director, Jonathan Hensleigh, and a couple promotional pieces: a trailer for the upcoming Punisher video game and a truly stupid promotional video by the remainder for a once-prominent band, Drowning Pool.

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## CAMPUS BRIEFS

### Experiment station federal agencies join in study

Texas Agricultural Experiment Station scientists are working cooperatively with federal agencies to assess the effectiveness of a fully funded conservation program as part of the 2002 Farm Bill. The Conservation Effects Assessment Project examines conservation programs across the nation. It is a watershed assessment which evaluates the benefits of conservation programs in selected watersheds — including the Little Bosque rivers in Texas. "This has two main benefits," said Dugas, director of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station Blackland Research and Extension Center in Temple. "It will confirm and justify the funds for conservation programs on farms and it sustains and improves environmental quality." The experiment station is receiving approximately \$600,000 annually in 2007 for its participation in the project. The results will be taken to Washington and used for a conservation assessment, Dugas said. For more information, go to: <http://agnews.tamu.edu/news/stories/AGPR/Sep2304>