

Payback

This was singularly one of the most brutally sadistic, yet wacky romps that I have seen in a while. You know you're in for a good time from the very opening scene, when Mel Gibson is lying bleeding on a backroom operating table, having a couple of bloody bullets dug out of him by a half-drunk back alley surgeon that sterilizes everything in the glass of bourbon that he's always sucking on.

From there the film takes off as Mel, who plays Porter, single-mindedly seeks out and destroys anyone who gets in the way of him getting his seventy grand back. The big running joke in the movie is that they always think he wants one hundred and thirty grand.

I haven't seen Mel get the crap beat out of him so often in a film since I saw the first "Mad Max". I mean, he seriously gets messed up! How bad? Well, near the end of the movie there is a scene with a sledgehammer and his bare toes. Eew! Plus that Chinese chick from Alley McBeal plays a dominatrix that keeps getting turned on whenever she beats the crap out of people, or for that matter, when they beat the crap out of her.

You never go five minutes in "Payback" without somebody being hit, bloodied or shot, which is always a sign of quality. It is so dark and oppressive, that if it weren't so saturated in cynicism, it would be hard to sit through. The gray, washed out color scheme makes "Dolores Claiborne" look absolutely prismic. It's like you're touring through Gotham City in the daylight. And everybody is crooked, the cops, the hookers, everybody. It's just a matter of who is stabbing who in the back, and why.

So, you may ask, what is the moral of this sordid tale of a one man assault on a citadel of evil? Um...actually there is none. It's just sort of there for your sadistic pleasure. For all the bludgeony, backstabbing, and basic evil skullduggery, I have to give "Payback" the Happy Mark on the Mark-O-Meter. It is a throwback to a different era of filmmaking, yet still refreshing enough for modern day film freaks like me. Just remember, Mel Gibson's toes and a sledgehammer. That's good filmmaking. Yum.