

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING FOR MAY 21-27, 2011

TV The Journal view



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'Jesse Stone' keeps Tom Selleck fueled after 'Blue Bloods' season

Tom Selleck stars in "Jesse Stone: Innocents Lost" Sunday on CBS.

See Page 4 for more details.



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Double Take: "Priest"

Josh: "Priest" is so bad it needs an exorcist
Matt: Meh, I've seen worse

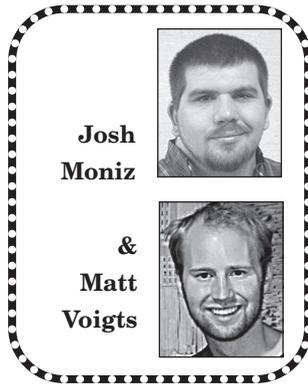
Josh: "Priest" is, by far, one of the worst films I have ever seen. Keep in mind, I have a love of bad movies. "Priest," however, is a cheap attempt to make a generic action flick that utterly fails. The film is so bad, I actually wonder if it isn't secretly a giant practical joke on the audience.

The first problem is the plot. The vampire war story is goofy. But, the movie keeps going. It adds a vaguely Catholic theocracy government, priest super soldiers and vampire reservations for no reason.

Here's the problem: none of that is essential to the plot. The bizarre elements are just excuses to set up various actions/fight scenes. If that's the movie's goal, then it could have done it with less plot. What makes it really bad is that the pointless details make the movie make less sense. For example, the capital city is always cloaked in darkness from some reason. Why then are all the vehicles solar powered? And, why would you live there if vampires exist?

The priests save humanity and a church runs everything, but the priests are outcasts. Shouldn't people be treating them like heroes?

Even the art direction adds further nonsense to the film. The vampire monsters aren't



**Josh
Moniz**

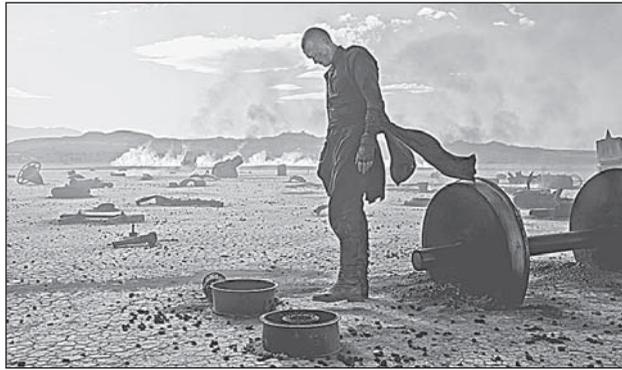
**&
Matt
Voigts**

Draculas, but instead some kind of eyeless animals. I'm sure that someone was trying to be clever, but it just makes me wonder how they avoid sunlight if they can't see it. Worse yet, the hives they make from gunk they secrete, like bees, actually have big holes in the top. Wouldn't that let light directly in?

I could list dozens more, but I think I got the general idea across.

One thing I would like to add is that Paul Bettany, who I believe could be a decent action star, is absolutely ridiculous. He puts his all into his acting, but the scene is too wacky for the audience to care. Also, he tries to sound like Christian Bale in "The Dark Knight," but his voice range can't pull it off. The result is actually pretty hilarious.

Matt: Like Josh, I've seen some bad movies in my day. I walked away from "Priest" disappointed that it isn't as incompetently made as six or so of the Friday the 13th sequels or even last year's "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen." The



Paul Bettany stands in a desert wasteland as sparse as the plot of "Priest."

movie has many problems, sure, but let me attempt to make sense of it.

First, Priest is a Western. In fact, it's "The Searchers," in which Comanches kill Civil War vet John Wayne's brother and sister-in-law and he must head into Indian territory to recover his niece. The similarities are clearly intentional – heck, the kidnapped young lady in both movies is named "Lucy." Sources more knowledgeable than myself inform me this blatant homage / rip-off is not present in the Korean comic book on which Priest is based.

The movie's genre lineage is eminently present in the movie's production design aside, including the deserts settings, Karl Urban's duster-clad villain, and the train car finale. The marketing, however, doesn't explicitly call the movie a "Western," and all "Priest's" other elements – especially everything related to the totalitarian religio-corporate entity of the "Church" – don't fit well with the archetypes of the grizzled loaner and the threatened

homesteaders. Taken together, it's a muddled mess, but if you read the movie in terms of those archetypes, you can at least attempt to understand what the filmmakers were trying to do.

And if you block out the movie's awful dialogue and horrid acting, the sparse, washed-out desert color palette is eerily beautiful. The depth of field on the 3D is also some of the best I've yet seen, the opposite of last week's "Thor." Nearly every scene has a strong sense of visual scope, even if the characters' personalities couldn't be flatter and all the actions scenes are dull and perfunctory.

Josh: I disagree about the movie being a Western. I think what is really going on in the film is that the director is wholesale stealing scenes and techniques from films he likes, regardless if it makes any sense. For example, the giant priest statues outside the city are clearly a rip off of the giant statues in "The Lord of the Rings." Homage is fine, but if it's point-

lessly, then it's just dumb.

As for the bad guy, who is only named Black Hat in the credits, he's the only reason I'm not giving this film a rating of 1. He's essentially a vampire version of Clint Eastwood from the spaghetti westerns. The scene where he's dancing while the vampires destroy a town is actually pretty cool.

My ultimate grievance with this film is that nothing is explained, so you end up both not understanding what is going on and not caring. Barely five minutes into the film, we see the character that becomes Black Hat get pulled into the vampire next and Bettany's shouting because he failed to save him. Absolutely nothing about their relationship is explained beforehand, so you don't know why he cares. Just a few moments of back story would have made a huge difference. You would not only be able to understand what anything is supposed to mean, but you would actually be able to invest in the film.

Matt: Those statues just outside the city gates do look straight out of "Lord of the Rings," but the desert easily be Monument Valley. The scene where Bettany speeds his motorcycle past them out into the vast nothingness of the desert is hilarious for the contrast between urgency and pointlessness – but just imagine him on horseback and maybe it would make a little more sense.

I'm not arguing this makes "Priest" a good movie – as I said, it's a muddled mess. But I disagree that things aren't ex-

plained – the anime sequence at the beginning sets up the whole war, and exposition is used every time a character is introduced. It's just that none of the explanations hold together cohesively, and none of it is thought out beyond 'Hey, this ought to look good.' It would be nice if we knew more about Black Hat and Bettany's character's relationship, in a timely manner, but even justifying why they would exist in the world of the movie is beyond the narrative's capabilities. I'm not excusing the movie, just saying you can find some rhyme and reason to what happens, even if it's not on particularly solid ground.

Josh: 2/10, Matt: 4/10

Synopsis:

In an alternate reality, the world has been in a constant state of war between vampires and humans. The humans create a class of super soldier priests that wipe out the vampires. Following that, the priests are forced to reintegrate back into society and the government, which is ruled by the church, becomes reclusive. However, when the niece of a priest is kidnapped, it becomes clear the vampire menace has returned. Based on a graphic novel by Min-Woo Hyung.

Starring: Paul Bettany, Karl Urban, Cam Gigandet, Maggie Q and Lily Collins

Director: Scott Charles Stewart

Writer: Cory Goodman

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