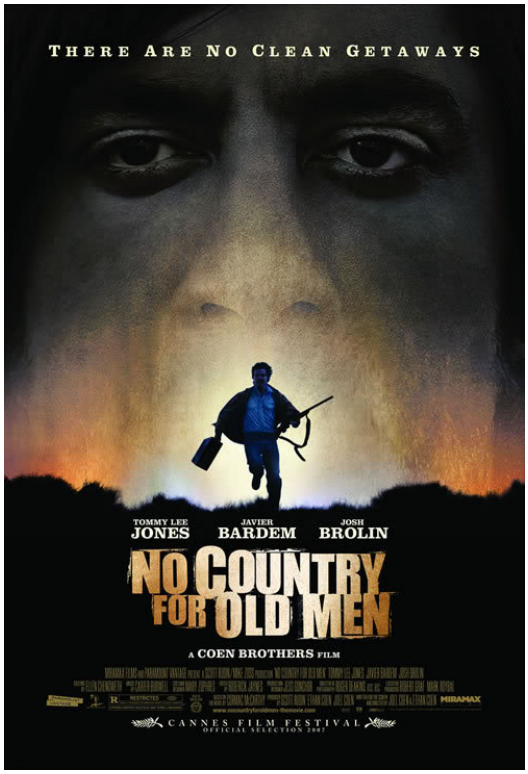
Over the last three days, Mitch has reviewed "Michael Clayton", "Atonement", and "There Will Be Blood". Today, he takes a look at the fourth Best Picture of the Year candidate for us, "No Country For Old Men". Directed by the Coen Brothers and starring Tommy Lee Jones, violence and mayhem ensue after a hunter stumbles upon some dead bodies, a stash of heroin and more than $2 million in cash near the Rio Grande. Mitch gives us his thoughts ...



There was this boy I sent to the gas chamber at Huntsville here a while back. My arrest and my testimony. He killed a fourteen-year-old girl. Papers said it was a crime of passion but he told me there wasn't any passion to it. Told me that he'd been planning to kill somebody for about as long as he could remember. Said that if they turned him out he'd do it again. Said he knew he was going to hell. Be there in about fifteen minutes. I don't know what to make of that. I surely don't. The crime you see now, it's hard to even take its measure. It's not that I'm afraid of it. I always knew you had to be willing to die to even do this job - not to be glorious. But I don't want to push my chips forward and go out and meet something I don't understand. You can say it's my job to fight it, but I don't know what it is anymore. More than that, I don't want to know. A man would have to put his soul at hazard. He would have to say, "O.K., I'll be part of this world."

The above monologue is spoken by Tommy Lee Jones as Sheriff Ed Tom Bell in the Coen Brothers' highly praised movie "No Country for Old Men".

Ominous words, indeed, as you surely know that you and Ed Tom are about to "meet something I don't understand" in regards to pure evil. You nor him will like what you see coming, and you won't understand it; but you won't be able to take your eyes away from it.

The movie is set in west Texas in 1980, where a Vietnam Vet and "retired welder" Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) lives in a trailer with his young wife Carla Jean (Kelly Macdonald). Lacking much of anything better to do, Llewelyn is out in the sticks hunting antelope when he comes across a grisly scene; a drug deal gone bad, with all the protagonists dead (except one that is almost there). He sees the heroin in the back of a pickup, and follows a trail of blood to an isolated tree where the Last Man Standing no longer is...he's lying dead up against the tree, a satchel next to him containing two million dollars.

Llewelyn takes the money and runs, but later makes the first of many, many mistakes. Wracked by guilt for leaving the one severely wounded man back at the site of the massacre, he goes back with some water; and is discovered by some of the dealers, barely escaping on foot. Of course, with his truck still at the site, it won't take long to identify him. And of course, he wants to keep the money, so going to the sheriff is out of the question.

Enter Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), a cold blooded killer without an ounce of humanity. Sporting the worst Prince Valiant haircut since paisley shirts were in fashion, a shotgun with a silencer, and an air canister used to shoot a prod into door locks or human skulls, Chigurh is soon hot on Llewelyn's trail. Sheriff Ed Tom knows the people of his town well, and knows of Llewelyn's survival skills based on his Vietnam experience, but he also knows that Llewelyn is in over his head, and the race is on to see who catches whom.

The film itself is near brilliant in so many ways. The Coen Brothers have done a remarkable job with the casting, the adaptation of the Cormac McCarthy novel, and the cinematography. The pacing is also electric and unrelenting...almost enough to be qualified as a "suspense" film.

You could almost see Ed Tom Bell as one of those stereotypical "good old boy" sheriffs who play dumb but are really smart. Tommy Lee Jones can't "play dumb". Ed Tom may talk with a drawl and amble about slowly while telling stories designed to get people to open up to him, but he is sharp as a tack, and doesn't try to hide that fact. It is the same type of law enforcement role that Frances McDormand played on the other Coen classic, "Fargo", except no one underestimates Ed Tom like they did Marge Gunderson.

Jones wears this role as comfortably as he wears his leathered skin...enough so that it is completely impossible to imagine anyone else in the part. Jones is the consummate professional, and even though the scenes he appears in tend to be a lot slower paced than that cat-n-mouse game between Llewelyn and Chigurh, he makes them completely memorable.

Josh Brolin is certainly enjoying a career rebirth. Stuck for almost a decade in mostly supporting roles in B-Grade (or worse) movies like "Gang in Blue", "Mimic", and "Coastlines", Brolin's luck started to turn a few years ago with the well received replacement series "Mister Sterling". Following that with excellent supporting roles in higher quality projects like Steve Spielberg's "Into the West", "Grindhouse", "In the Valley of Elah", and "American Gangster" he has been given an opportunity to shine in such a large role, and he is definitely up to the challenge. His performance is spot-on in all areas; concern for his wife, determination, resiliency, and quite often full out run-for-your-life panic. Look for Brolin to continue appearing in high profile films in the months ahead.

But the real break-out star from this movie, as you've probably all heard, is Javier Bardem as Chigurh. He has created a truly unique monster in this "killer with a code", and is certain to end up with the ultimate prize for it; an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. But as fantastic as Bardem was, I disagree with many critics that are calling Chigurh the next Hannibal Lecter. He wasn't...not even close. As Lecter, Anthony Hopkins toyed with everyone using his charm and his vastly superior intellect. He was a monster, but he also had his human side, too, and you reveled in seeing how his twisted mind worked.

Chigurh has no time nor need for subtlety nor mind games. If he asks a man kindly to get out of a car before he kills him, it's just so he doesn't have to clean the mess up before stealing the car. In one exceptional scene early in the film, he obviously wants to kill an older gas station owner that has somehow annoyed him, but he allows that decision to come down to a flip of a coin.

In other words, he isn't a Lecter...he is a Terminator. A completely unfeeling killing machine guided by ones and zeros (or heads or tails).

You would think that with all of the raving I'm doing about the movie, that I loved it, and that it's going to get a really high rating.

You would be wrong.

This movie had so much going for it, and then the wheels just flat out fell off at the end, enough so that it pretty much ruined it for me.

Once again, my desire to leave spoilers out of my reviews makes it hard to elaborate on my disagreements, but I will say that the resolution to the Llewelyn/Chigurh chase was completely deflating and anti-climatic. It was like watching a great pitchers duel with the score tied at zero going into the ninth, and then both managers inexplicably yank them for junkball relievers, and the final score ends up 9 - 6.

It was poor film making. It was directors thumbing their nose at the audience because they wanted to do something "different". And it still ticks me off thinking about it.

They then follow that let-down with three different scenes that add nothing of note

to the film. A final meeting between two of the characters that was left without the audience truly knowing how it ended. Then a strange car accident with a character walking away with a badly broken arm. And then finally with Ed Tom Bell telling this story about a dream he had; one that seemed totally unrelated to the entire movie.

All of this was completely disjointed given the style of the rest of the film...and it wasn't like "Lord of the Rings", which was criticized by some for its 30 final minutes of continued "endings". I forgave Peter Jackson for that, because after spending almost 12 hours with all of those elves, dwarves, and hobbits, I wanted that level of resolution.

But for the Coen Brothers, the last bits resolved nothing, and were also quite disturbing in many levels.

This film is still excellent, and in many, many was truly outstanding...and it probably will win the Oscar for Best Picture.

On the awards stand for receiving the "Best Cast in a Motion Picture Award" at the Screen Actors' Guild Awards (the SAG equivalent of Best Picture), one of the Coens made the comment "and we don't CARE if you don't like how it ended!", acknowledging the backlash they have received.

Yes, Ethan or Joel...it was obvious that you didn't care.

And that's why you get...

Frank Ryan (3 footballs)