



This Week: The Punisher

Marvel Comics Company has never had much luck with movies. Captain America has bombed twice, on and off the big screen. Spiderman's t.v. movies- not to mention the cartoons- were really awful. And who could forget (no matter how hard they try) the Incredible Hulk movies of the last few years, where Dr. Banner begs his enemies "Don't get me angry... you won't like it when I'm angry..." just before he pops every button on his shirt and squishes all the bad guys? It's amazing that Marvel can't seem to do a decent picture, especially when old number two (D.C., in case you were wondering) keeps churning out such hits as Superman and Batman. Could it be that number two tries harder?

After watching The Punisher twice, that's the impression I got. Marvel can't make a decent superhero pic because they're not trying hard enough. The Punisher was released to theatres in Europe only, and went straight to video here and in the States. And that's too bad, because if they'd done just a little more work this violent junk classic could have become the second Rambo. For those of you not familiar with the Punisher, I have one question: Have you all been under a rock? This guy is the second biggest gun (pun intended) in Marvel's line-up, right behind Wolverine. How could you walk past a comic shop without noticing the guy in the black tights with the huge skull on the chest who is carrying guns bigger than he is? Well, it doesn't matter, because even Punisher's most devoted fans aren't going to recognize him in this movie.

The movie stars Dolph Lundgren (the bad guy from Universal Soldier) in the title role. Once upon a time he was Frank Castle, mild-mannered, disturbed 'Nam vet cop of Italian descent with a wife and kid. The Vietnam experience made Castle short tempered, the Italian bloodline made him rabidly anti-mafia, and the cop bit made the mafia rabidly anti-Castle. So the mob blew up Frank's family. Frank survived, got his hands on a lot of illegal heavy assault rifles, took up residence in a tasteful section of the sewer, and began a one man war on the mob as... (dramatic pause and music sting) THE PUNISHER™!

Dops! I just remembered that nobody's supposed to know about that at the beginning of the movie. Forget I said it.

Here's the plotline: The Punisher is really getting on the nerves of the local crime bosses. After he blows up a mansion full of mobsters they decide to get rid of him. But since they're complete morons, they have to cooperate with a group of Female

Japanese Ninja Mobsters who've been taking over their territory. But before you can say "Double-Cross!" the F.J.N.M. start to take over the Italian mob. They kidnap the mobsters' kids and the mob enlists the Punisher to rescue them (huh?). The Punisher then teams up with the mob leader to blow up all the F.J.N.M. Boom, boom, rat-tat-tat, boom, slash. Fade out. The end.

Dolph has help from an Unemployed Alcoholic Street-dwelling Thespian (read: drunk, out-of-work homeless actor). This guy is a very informed source, and his overacted, melodramatic and pseudo-Shakespearean diction adds just one more ludicrous angle to an already absurd movie. And watch for the part where he follows a remote control trunk loaded with a forty-ouncer right to the feet of Mr. Punisherhead.

And have I mentioned those incredible action scenes? The ones where the Punisher shoots lots of people and destroys lots of property? No? They're really funny because they were filmed in the comic book style. That means that when someone throws something, grenade, spiked ball, hamster, or whatever, it gets shown from three different angles as it flies: one as it leaves the thrower's hand, two is a side view of the weapon in flight, and three shows the weapon lodged in some poor sap's abdomen. Great fun. Then there are those overblown hand-to-hand combat scenes near the end where the Punisher fights against a ninja master while a lens filter makes everything turn shades of red. And let's not forget the best scene of the movie: The Punisher and The Mobster versus A Zillion Billion Ninjas! Can you say "perforate with extreme prejudice?" I knew you could.

Dolph Lundgren is a really bad actor, though not as bad as Arnold was in the Conan movies. He looks really impressive dressed in leather and heavy weaponry, and he's got that "look of death" (an imposing stare that is required of all action movie heroes regardless of sex, race, religion or shoe size) down pat. If he gets a few more movies like Universal Soldier and stops doing moronic (but fun!) stuff like this, he could very well become as successful as the Arnster.

Judgement: Good, clean, dumb fun for fans of guns, Lundgren, ninjas or stupid movies. The only people who might not like it are fans of the comics: this Punisher lives in the sewer, drives an American-made motorcycle, and does not have the white skull on his suit. They might get upset about how badly this movie butchers the original. Too bad about them. The rest of us B-movie devotees will have lots of fun. Next week: When Captain America hurls his mighty lunch... ■