

## Movie Review: Max Payne

Written by {ga=mitch}

Sunday, November 02 2008 7:00 PM -

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"Max Payne" is the latest attempt to make a full length feature film based on a popular video game. And it landed a big star for the lead role, with Mark Wahlberg playing the part of the rogue NYPD cop hell bent on getting revenge for the brutal murder of his wife and infant child. We sent Mitch to the theaters to review this one for our readers, and he does just that in his latest column.



"Max Payne" is the latest attempt to make a full length feature film based on a popular video game. As such, it is very similar to a movie that came out last year, one that also had a lone gunman going gonzo with the heavy artillery; "Hitman". I didn't review that film, but I did finally watch it...finding it incredibly stupid, but with enough artistic style points so that it probably would have gotten 1 ½ footballs if I were to give it a grade.

Unfortunately, "Max Payne" isn't as good as "Hitman". It has a bigger star in Mark Wahlberg, and it certainly had a bigger budget to work with. But at least "Hitman" had the "intelligence" to know what it was; a dumb action-thriller, and to play to that genre. "Max Payne" attempts to be a legitimate quasi film noire work of art, which falls completely flat thanks to a convoluted, moronic script, tepid direction, and an editor who evidently used one of the villain's machetes to splice film together.

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Wahlberg has the title role, cementing his victory in the "What the Hell Was He Thinking In Taking This Role?" Award for 2008, for this role and for him headlining the Worst Movie of 2008, "The Happening". At least Wahlberg doesn't stink in this movie (like he did in "The Happening")...he just doesn't have a chance to do anything with the role, as Max Payne may be the most boring, unsympathetic leading man ever created for an action adventure movie.

Yes, we feel sorry for Max. Three years after his wife and infant child were brutally murdered, he's working in the basement of the NYPD, manning the Cold Case files while continuing to look for clues to find the killer. Revenge is all that Max has on his mind, and since he's not much of a talker, that leaves very little room for anything closely resembling character development. Max's social circle consists of a former partner (Donal Logue), who Max now dislikes and a former mentor in BB Hensley (Beau Bridges...I guess they couldn't afford Jeff), who now heads up security for a large pharmaceutical company where Max's wife used to work. He doesn't really do anything with them...they just show up every now and then to provide the dialog.

At one point in Max's Quest, he runs across an attractive Russian woman named (naturally) Natasha (Olga Kurylenko...the next Bond Girl), who is first seen arguing with her bad-assed sister (Mila Kunis). For some totally unknown reason, Max allows the Bad Girl to go home with her, but he quickly throws her out.

The plot up until that point made little sense. After that point? It made no sense whatsoever. There are bad people about, and demonic winged creatures flying around, and strange drugs, and cover ups and bad cops and Russian hitwomen....and I think I just saw a winged kitchen sink fly by as well.

That, in a nutshell, is the biggest problem with "Max Payne"; it has no idea what it is supposed to be. Is it a supernatural thriller like "Constantine"? A fantasy like "The Matrix"? Over-the-top escapism like "Shoot 'Em Up" or "Wanted"? A futuristic,

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stylish crime film like "Sin City" or "Blade Runner"? Or a portrait of a Lone Super-Spy/Cop like the Bourne series? It attempts to be "All of the Above"...and fails at every level due to the mishmash.

Director John Moore has directed three other major films, and all of them were critical and financial failures; "Behind Enemy Lines", "Flight of the Phoenix", and the remake of "The Omen". Quite frankly, he's not very good, and it shows at almost every level. If he was a banker, he'd be in charge of Lehman Brothers.

Mostly his incompetence shows in the uneven work he gets out of his cast. Beau Bridges' only talent in life is to stand in stark contrast to the abilities of his brother Jeff (using the Wahlberg connection; Beau Bridges is the Johnny "Drama" Chase to Jeff Bridges Vincent Chase in "Entourage"). Then there is Chris O'Donnell, still wondering where the hell his career ended up, playing a stereotypical sniveling mid-level executive up to no good, and Chris "Ludacris" Bridges as the Internal Affairs cop investigating Max...who of course turns into the one cop who believes in him. (and I can't resist the irony of mentioning how appropriate it is to have an actor named "Ludacris" associated with this script).

Worst in the casting is diminutive Mila Kunis as Natasha's sister, Mona Sax (another name right out of Video Gamers-R-Us). The former tart from "That 70s Show" is almost laughable as a deadly assassin who develops a soft spot for Max. Seeing her running around with a gun and an attitude was almost as believable as Adam Sandler as a pro quarterback in "The Longest Yard".

For me; the worst part of all of this was the fact that there were many times during the movie that I STILL thought it had potential to be something much better. The cinematography was excellent, and there were several set pieces that went well. But every single time I'd start getting hooked in a bit after they floated something that seemed intriguing, the whole thing would veer back off into Idiotsville.

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Despite that, I would still say that at least I wasn't bored, and with 20 minutes left in the movie, I was thinking to myself that if the ending didn't suck, I could have seen myself giving two or two and a half footballs to this movie just for the entertainment value. Buzzzzzz: Wrong Answer. What I got instead was watching completely mindless predictability, right down to the "we will now end the film by setting up the sequel" finale.

They can set it up all they want. They won't be seeing me back in the theater to catch the second one.

My Rating - Jeff Garcia. One football. All Hype, no performance.