

Ghost Rider, Texas Ranger

David Stark

The Clackamas Print

Nicholas Cage sold his soul to the devil for an entertaining movie.

That's what happens in the movie adaptation of Marvel Comics' *Ghost Rider*.

When Texas stunt-rider Johnny Blaze (Cage) finds out that his father has come down with cancer, he's willing to do anything to help him. That's when Mephistopheles (Peter Fonda) finds him and makes a deal: Johnny's dad will be cured, and Johnny will become the devil's "rider" sometime in the future.

Old Scratch calls in the favor when he needs to recover a contract worth a thousand sinners' souls. The latter half of the movie sees a reunion with Blaze's old girlfriend (Eva Mendes), a grave-keeping mentor (Sam Elliott) and a series of fights with Mephistopheles' rebellious son, Blackheart (Wes Bentley), who is also after the contract.

Cage does a good, and more than often over-the-top, job as the morally-confused Blaze, and Mendes does an adequate job as

Roxanne Simpson — but Peter Fonda's performance is wicked and wonderful. But unfortunately, Bentley's performance is confusing as hell; half the time I didn't know whether he was supposed to be scary or funny.

The script is, well, better than most superhero movies. The lines and actors never break character and are done well, excepting the aforementioned Bentley problem.

What sets the film apart from other films featuring gothic heroes are the remarkable visual effects. The effects when Cage first transforms into Ghost Rider are particularly impressive; the flesh burning off of his skull is perhaps the best done of the movie — although the motorcycle deserves no small mention, either.



Internet Photo

Johnny Blaze (Nicholas Cage) rides with his predecessor, dubbed the Western Ghost Rider (Sam Elliott), in the latest Marvel comic film *Ghost Rider*.

But sadly, the film doesn't quite measure up. It seemed confused about whether or not it was going to be an action or a horror film.

In the end, it decided to be an action flick, but not a very good one. And honestly, using the source material, *Ghost Rider* could have been an excellent horror film.

Hero with a flaming skull, villainous son of Satan; what part of that equation doesn't equal horror film?

However, my biggest question about the movie is: Why would a would-have-been excellent summer action flick come out two days after Valentine's Day?

'The Italian' captures audience, opens eyes

Ott Tammik

The Clackamas Print

'Italian' raises eyebrows at the Portland International Film Fest

Past the glorious streets of Tsarist St. Petersburg, and past still the crumbling, gray cinderblock of Soviet projects, is a place unknown to outsiders. This land seems to lose itself from the world's eye into the swallowing countryside fog.

"This is real Russia," said the Italian.

In a place of broken lives and bleak futures, Director Andrei Kravchuk's *The Italian* explores how bedtime stories and candy still find a place in the harsh reality of a post-Soviet orphanage. Kravchuk touches the viewer without ever selling out the film's integrity, but unfortunately, the plot is not nearly as intriguing as the initial setting.

The movie's strengths lie in the portrayal of northern Russia's austere climate, and a fascinating hierarchy of rich personalities. Set in a rundown building, headed by an inept alcoholic, the impoverished orphanage collaborates with the controlling Madam (Maria Kuznetsova), who traffics the children to Western European families.

Vanya (Kolya Spiridonov) is a

cute, but often deceptive, six-year-old who finds himself the envy of the orphanage when he is chosen to be adopted by an Italian couple. However, when Vanya meets the devastated mother of another recent adoptee, he becomes obsessed with his lost mother and runs away to find her.

The children grow up around the uncensored realities of alcohol, theft and prostitution. Their fates are reflected by the older orphans, who live a defeatist lifestyle in the mysterious boiler room.

Kravchuk casts a darker tone on the everyday life of the orphanage. As an older girl reads *Winnie the Pooh* to the children before bedtime, one orphan whispers to another, "There are good foreigners and bad foreigners. The bad ones take kids for parts."

Although *The Italian* is thematically intense, the whole movie has a subtle quality to it, and the director gives us a sense of hope between the contrasting nature of childhood innocence and the premature exposure to the dark realities of life. In a struggle for survival, the relationships and motives blur the lines between good and evil in a vaguely romanticized but otherwise realist view.

The Italian is never spoiled for cheap audience approval, but the plot gets carried away. Vanya's quest to find his mother becomes a surfeited chase, which adds little to the story. The director takes the easy way out,

seeing too much necessity in creating a grandiose plot. There is an excess of *Home Alone*-style tricks, and by the end of the movie, the viewer wonders if *The Kid's* Bruce Willis is going to

pop up from around the next corner.

Nevertheless, *The Italian* is an eye-opening movie, and I would not be surprised if it joins the classics of Russian film.



Internet Photo

A scene from Andrei Kravchuk's *The Italian*, which was shown at the Portland International Film Festival earlier this month.



THE REASONS WHY...

- BACHELOR OF ARTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY
- BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HUMAN STUDIES
- BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PSYCHOLOGY
- BACHELOR OF ARTS IN SOCIOLOGY
- Professional Certificate in GERONTOLOGY

YEAR-ROUND ADMISSION

- SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS
- FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING
- SEMINAR-STYLE CLASSES

To meet with an advisor, e-mail studentinfo@marylhurst.edu or call 503.699.6268.

★ US News & World Report BEST COLLEGES 2007
"Number one in the Northwest for small classes"

MARYLHURST UNIVERSITY

JUST 10 MINUTES SOUTH OF PORTLAND
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities accredited
17600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY (HWY. 43) MARYLHURST, OREGON
Serving students since 1893. www.marylhurst.edu 800.634.9982

News briefs: Nintendo, BBC and Amazon.com

This week, in the interest of getting the *D-Pad* staff back to its roots, I thought I'd look at what's going on in the news surrounding the gaming world.

First, in what's probably the funniest news bit I've read in a while, it turns out that the BBC *World News* has figured out an even easier way of getting their hands on the *Associated Press* news wire. A user over at the *Gameworld* Network site sent them a photo of a BBC broadcast with the Nintendo Wii news channel open on a TV in the background. That's right: the BBC, one of the largest news outlets on the planet, is getting their news from their Nintendo. I can't wait until they do a news piece on how you can use the Wii's Web-browser to Google porn in your living room.

In other news (I've always wanted to say that), Sony continues to be a bigger laughing stock of the gaming community than Paul Anderson — that British director who keeps screwing up videogame movies — and their latest sales numbers at Amazon have proven that horsepower means nothing.

As it turns out, the Super Nintendo — the very same 16-bit console from last decade — is ranked number 18 on Amazon's recent top 100 best-selling video game-related items list, where the PS3 is ringing in at number 23. Sony isn't the only one getting slapped by consumers, though, as the original gray Nintendo 64 controller outsells Microsoft's HD-DVD drive for the 360, but just barely.

Finally, the folks over at Game Informer (GI) are insisting that they have a price and tentative date for the rumored black, HDMI-capable X-box 360 with a bigger hard drive. The supposed price will be right around \$479, and it's supposed to be out by May, but GI won't reveal their sources, which is making me just a bit skeptical. May is only a couple months away, so I guess we'll find out if I'm going to be cancelling my GI subscription soon enough.

Now, a quick announcement: The *D-Pad* staff has begun to grow again, and plans are in the works to get our still-born site finally up and running. We should be able to launch in a couple months, but for now, I'm looking for content ideas, and I'd love some feedback on what kind of stuff we should add to the site such as a forum, comics, podcasts, news blog, etc. Any ideas from our three readers would be great.

thedpad@gmail.com