

# No Country for Old Men (2007)

Rated R. Our ratings: V- 4; L- 1; S/N-5 . Running time: 2 hours 2 min.

*Why are times not kept by the Almighty,  
and why do those who know him never see his days?  
The wicked remove landmarks;  
they seize flocks and pasture them.  
They drive away the donkey of the orphan;  
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.  
They thrust the needy off the road;  
the poor of the earth all hide themselves*

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*There are those who rebel against the light,  
who are not acquainted with its ways,  
and do not stay in its paths.  
The murderer rises at dusk  
to kill the poor and needy,  
and in the night is like a thief.  
Job 24:1-4, 13-14*

Tommy Lee Jones' Sheriff Ed Tom No Country for Old Men Bell, like his father and grandfather, has dedicated his life to enforcing the law in his part of south Texas. Jones' lived-in face is perfect for that of a compassionate lawman who has seen too much human depravity during his long career. When he discovers that local acquaintance Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) is connected with a recent massacre of drug dealers out in the desert, he sets forth to locate the fleeing

Moss. He soon learns that he is not the only man pursuing Moss: he must reach his quarry before Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), the hit man of the drug lord can find and kill him.

Moss, like the characters in *A Simple Plan*, has enough avarice in him that he makes the deadly mistake of taking a suitcase stuffed with two million dollars from the site of the bloody battle. He had been out antelope hunting when he came upon a scene that looks like the aftermath of a battle in Iraq, bullet riddled pick-ups and vans and bodies strewn about. One of the drivers is still alive, pleading in Spanish for water, but Moss has none to offer. Seeing the truck bed stuffed with packets of drugs, he comes upon the suitcase full of bundles of hundred dollar bills. He takes the suitcase and heads for his trailer home, where he tells Carla Jean Moss (Kelly Macdonald) to pack up and move to her mother's. He knows that men will come to the area looking for their money, but he does not know how quickly they will be able to find him, no matter where he hides—there is an electronic tracking device hidden in with the money. On his way out of town Moss's humane instincts lead him to revisit the drug exchange site to give the wounded man a jug of water. This is his second mistake: the drug dealers come to investigate the scene, chasing him off, away from his pickup. Although they fail to catch him in the desert night, they are able to use the truck's serial number to learn who it is that has their money. They go quickly to his abandoned trailer, find his telephone bill amongst the mail, and now are able to discover to whom his wife has fled.

The tracking device allows Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), a hit man/enforcer to follow Moss to the motel where he has sought refuge and a hiding place for the money. Javier Bardem turns in a compelling performance as the killer who uses a

cattle stun gun to blast his way past locks and to murder anyone who stands in his path. One of the film's most suspenseful moments is when he toys with a gas station clerk over wagering with a coin about payment for his tank of gas. There are also many other suspenseful moments as Moss narrowly escapes being caught by his pursuer.

In the meantime the drug lord sends another killer, Carson Wells (Woody Harrelson), as a back-up in case Chigurh fails. The latter is not at all happy about this, as it means a cut in his fee. The psychopath is not shy in expressing his rage. Back home Sheriff Bell is trying to gain a clear picture of what happened in the desert. Once he learns that Moss, whom he knows slightly, has fled with the money, he tries both to locate him and to persuade Carla Jean Moss that it would be better for her husband if she cooperated by notifying him when he contacts her again.

As in his other current film, Tommy Lee Jones is the man out of kilter with the changed times, as he expresses his despair at one point to his wife Loretta (Tess Harper—it is so good to see her again, even in what amounts to a cameo part). The film takes us into a dark world where human life has little value. Anton Chigurh is a twisted character with no compunctions whatever, and yet in the gas station scene he does the unexpected. He repeats his coin toss challenge at the end of the film, but we are left wondering what happens next. This is a film that does not tie everything neatly together, reminding me a little of the cliff-hanging ending of John Sayles' suspenseful *Limbo*. The violence is too grisly for this to be a family film, so beware. For those who can take it, the film is a good companion for pondering the passage from Job, or Psalms 37 and 73. Based on the novel by Cormac McCarthy, this has to be one of the Coen brothers best works since their very different *O Brother, Where Art Thou*.

## For Reflection/Discussion

Contains possible spoilers.

1) How does Jones' sheriff compare to his character in In the Valley of Elah? How are the worlds shown in the two films, one dealing in illegal violence and the other in government-sanctioned violence, essentially the same? Or would you agree to this? What do you see as the meaning of the film's title?

2) Do you feel a touch of the avarice in you that led Moss to take the money despite the risks? How is this the basis of state sanctioned lotteries and other games of "chance" ? How about the "get rich" (easily or quickly) schemes offered on the Internet or touted by success gurus in their books and seminars?

3) What irony do you see in that it was Moss's act of human decency that led to his exposing his family to danger from the criminals?

4) How did you feel during the scene when Anton Chigurh toyed with the gas station clerk? How did the man's refusal to call heads or tails possibly save his life? What do you think happened at the end of the film when Chigurh gave another person the same choice?

5) Do you think that the sheriff made the right decision at the end of the film? Why or why not?

6) How might the Scriptures mentioned at the end of the review be a comfort to him? Have you asked similar questions as Job did? How are life and the Scriptures a matter of sustaining us in faith, rather than answering our questions and fulfilling our desires?