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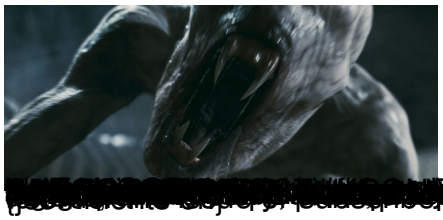
The definition of what a Western is has radically altered since the days of Edwin S. Porter and John Ford. The mythical archetypes that permeate this most American of genres have been consumed, regurgitated, bastardized, transcended, dissolved and liquefied to the point that almost every conflict-driven picture today can be read as distillation of the old black-hat-vs.-white-hat aesthetic. (Don’t believe us? Just check out our series of articles this issue on the work of John Carpenter…let’s just say that without the strong influence of the oaters of Howard Hawks, said articles most likely would have never ended up in this magazine at all.)

One look at the arid, sunburnt landscape of director and veteran visual FX artist Scott Stewart’s new thriller PRIEST, and it’s clear that we’re squarely in the realm of Sergio Leone, with its outpost towns, unshaven characters, black-clad outlaws and cleavage-popping damsels. Except the Wild West never had mutant motorcyclists marauding around its dusty landscapes, nor did it sport a crew of supernaturally gifted holy men or their quarry: hordes of bloodsucking vampires intent on eating those whose blood still runs red.

PRIEST, which after wrapping production last year was held by Screen Gems to give it a deluxe digital 3D overhaul for its release May 13, stars Paul Bettany (who also starred in Stewart’s previous theology-themed chiller LEGION) as the titular man of the cloth, with ghostly blue eyes and Eastwoodesque intensity, who breaks his vows of peace to rescue his niece from the fangs of the undead while running afoul of a corrupt church (led by Christopher Plummer’s Monsignor) that hides more than a few secrets. Loosely based on the cult Korean comic-book series by Hyung Min-woo, PRIEST aims to blend genres with style, taking elements of horror, science fiction, existential drama and old-fashioned good-vs.-evil morality and painting them into a world that is both familiar and alien.



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