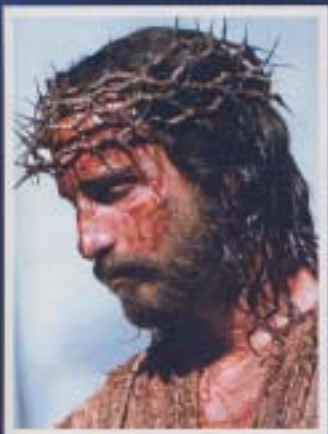


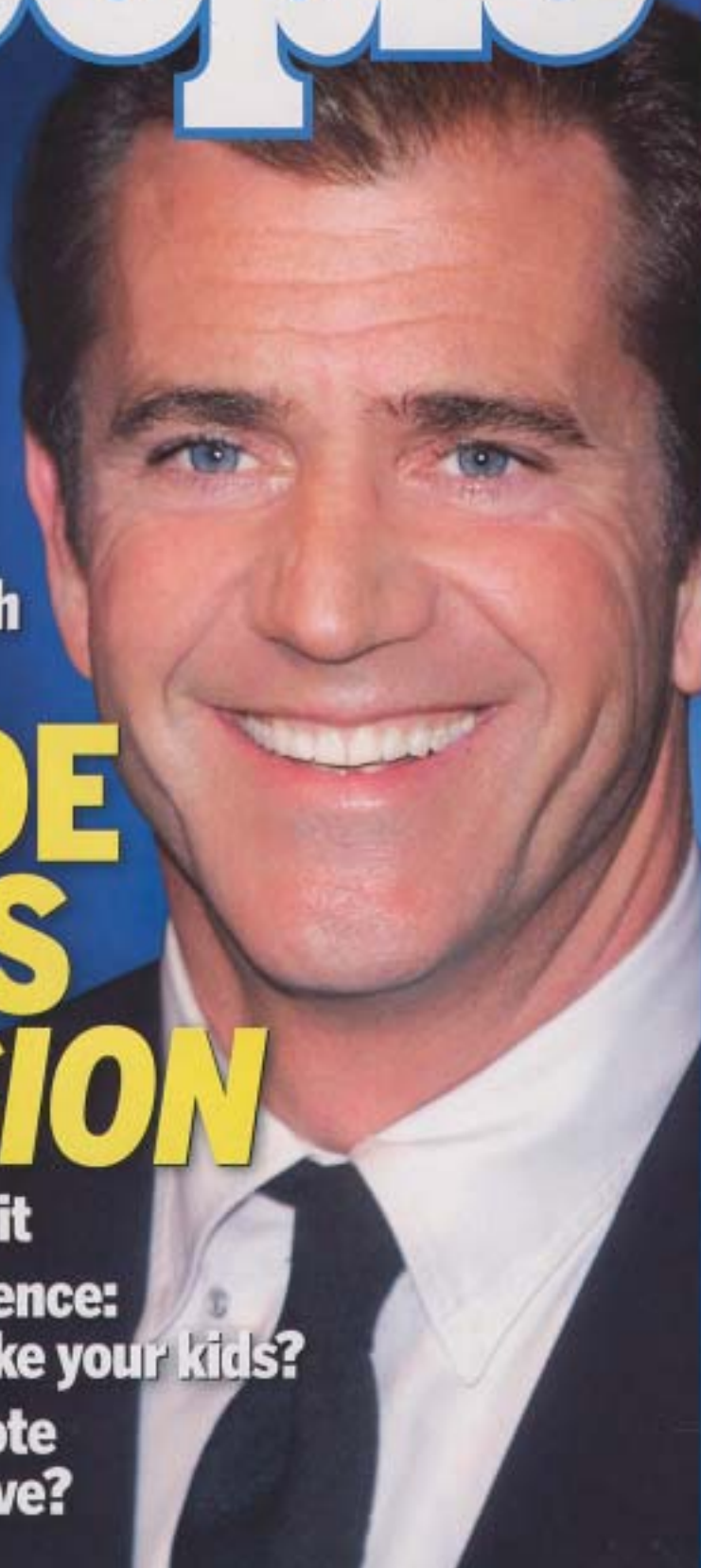
MARCH 8, 2004

SCREEN ACTORS
GUILD AWARDS

People



His film about
Jesus stirs faith
and outrage



INSIDE MEL'S PASSION

- Why he made it
- Shocking violence:
Should you take your kids?
- Does it promote
hatred? Or love?



**GLAMOR &
SURPRISES**



BIG FAT FIANCE:
Did her family
forgive her?



**JENNIFER
& MARC
GO PUBLIC**



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Cover

spoken line remains.) He also added a flashback in which Jesus instructs his disciples, "It's been said that you should hate your enemies, but I'm telling you, you have to love everybody, even those who've hurt you." Despite some lingering discomfort, leading national Jewish groups are not calling for a boycott. Says the American Jewish Committee's Rabbi James Rudin: "I respect Mr. Gibson and his faith, and his right to make this film."

Why isn't Gibson in the movie?

He is, but briefly. It's the director's left hand nailing Jesus to the cross. The cameo is more than a Hitchcockian gimmick. Gibson feels his telling of the Passion holds all humanity responsible for the death of Jesus. And, he has said, "I'm first on line for culpability. I did it."

By Allison Adato, Tom Cunniff and Amy Longsdorf in Los Angeles, Kathy Ehrich and Daniel S. Levy in New York City, Pam Grout in Chicago, Macon Morehouse in Washington, D.C., Margaret Nelson in Minneapolis and Praxilla Trabattani in Rome

SELLING THE PASSION

Gibson has joked that there will be no fast food tie-ins. But seeking to spread the word—and the Word—plenty of groups have created licensed products for *The Passion*. How to keep the trinkets tasteful? Says jewelry marketer Dwight Robinson: "We talk to religious leaders to see if we are conveying the same thing they hope to share with their churches."

THE JEWELRY

Santa Ana, Calif., designer Bob Siemon (who helped popularize "What Would Jesus Do?" bracelets) is cranking out 5,000 pewter nail pendants a day (\$16.99, right). Also for sale: charms that read "Passion" in Aramaic.



THE BOOK

No screen-to-page novelization, this is the New Testament with Jim Caviezel on the cover. Offering them at \$49.50 for a case of 50, the International Bible Society has sold 132,000 so far.

THE RACE CAR

Interstate Batteries chair Norm Miller loves Jesus—and NASCAR. The main sponsor for driver Bobby Labonte, he used the hood to promote the movie. (Labonte placed 11th at the Daytona 500.)



ABY LEAH ROZEN
ll the hype and controversy aside, how is *The Passion of the Christ* as a movie? Problematic and unsettling. Director-cowriter Mel Gibson has made a highly personal, narrowly focused film that will polarize viewers, with many—including myself—put off by its unrelenting violence and you-better-

already-know-the-backstory-because-there's-going-to-be-no-explaining-here approach to this recounting of Jesus' last 12 hours of life. It is, of course, Gibson's right to make exactly the film he wants, but his is an exclusionary rather than an inclusionary vision.

The violence is ceaseless and graphic. In a movie about compassion, Gibson shows little for his audience. It's not just that we see Jesus (Jim Caviezel) being whipped by Roman guards, but that the flogging drags on and on, with loving close-ups of the scourge marks oozing crimson. During the Crucifixion

Jim Caviezel's Jesus suffers mightily—as will violence-averse viewers.



blood spurts geyserlike, and the soundtrack reverberates with the crunch of bones as Christ's hands and feet are nailed to the cross.

What's lacking in *Passion*, a movie of compelling visuals and economical, often wordless storytelling, is any sense of context or character development. Jesus suffers mightily, but the greatest journey his character actually makes is the physical one up the hill to Golgotha. Although the film is sprinkled with flashbacks of Christ's life (including one showing off his innovative table-making skills), it's often unclear who's who and what's what unless you know your Gospels. Mary Magdalene (Monica Bellucci) seems

simply an attractive woman who's devoted to Jesus and his mother. And *The Passion* is fuzzy on what Christ has actually done to so anger the Jewish high priests calling for his death. Will the film encourage anti-Semitism? Possibly; the high priests are depicted as a snarling, bloodthirsty lot, but then again, the Roman guards are appallingly nasty too.

The acting, with a large, international cast speaking Aramaic, Latin and Hebrew, is generally solid. There's little of the grandstanding familiar from earlier biblical epics and even fewer bad wigs. Caviezel makes for a manly, one-note Jesus, a willing martyr who knows he's headed to a better place.

MOVIE REVIEW