

Gory violence abounds in 'State of Grace'

NEW YORK (CNS) — An undercover cop's loyalties are put to the test in "State of Grace" (Orion) when the woman he loves is also the sister of the two thugs he is assigned to kill — both of whom were his pals when he was growing up.

After a long absence, Terry Noonan (Sean Penn) returns to his old Irish neighborhood, a tough corner of New York known as Hell's Kitchen. Jackie Flannery (Gary Oldman), his boyhood best friend, welcomes him back and assures Terry he can join his gang, which is run with an iron fist by Jackie's older brother, Frankie (Ed Harris).

The brothers have become cold-blooded killers and their lifestyle is rejected by their younger sister, Kathleen (Robin Wright). She can't forget, however, that Terry was her first infatuation and soon they become lovers.

At the same time, unaware that he is an undercover cop gathering evidence on her brothers, Kathleen despises that he's in this murderous gang.

Frankie, meanwhile, is so eager to increase his power by joining forces with a rival Italian mobster that he personally cuts the throat of one of his own men to appease his rival, who soon demands Frankie offer one more victim to close the deal — his own brother Jackie.

When Terry gets wind of the plot he must choose between betrayal or duty, and



Actors Gary Oldman (left) and Sean Penn star with actress Robin Wright in *State of Grace*.

Brian Hammill/Orion Pictures Corporation

his own life and future with Kathleen hang in the balance.

Unfortunately, director Phil Joanou focuses heavily on brutality and casual slaughter throughout the film. Men are shot at point-blank range again and again, and Jackie finds it amusing to keep a pair of severed human hands in his freezer to use as a prop for jokes.

Nonetheless, the late-night mean streets

of New York are effectively captured in the look of the film, and Burgess Meredith is excellent in a cameo as an old barfly.

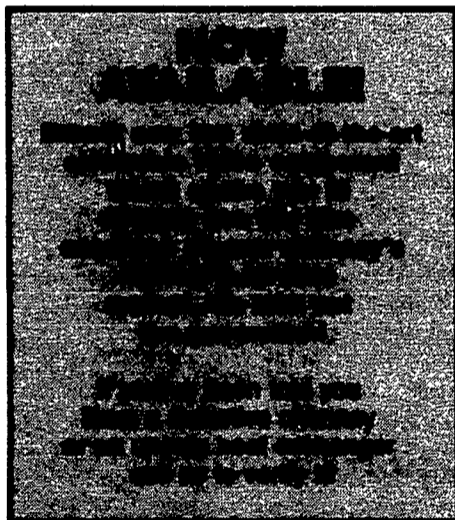
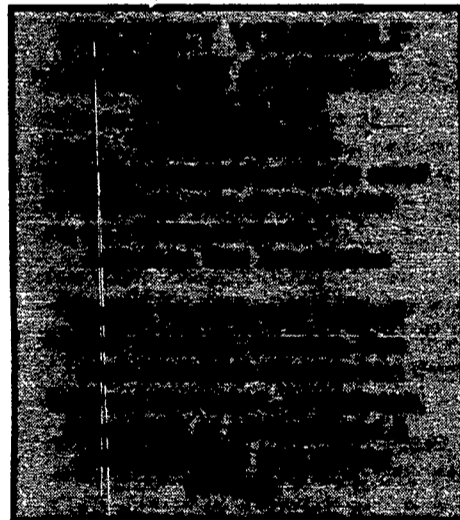
Some may find it offensive that the characters' Catholic backgrounds are in constant evidence — Terry wears a crucifix, Jackie a miraculous medal, several sets of rosary beads line a gangster's coffin and the drunken Jackie slobbers in a church scene (and gives the

statue of St. Anthony a beer for good measure).

Because of much gory violence and rough language, positive treatment of macho, anti-feminist attitudes and brief nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive.

The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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'Hardware' provides stark look at future

NEW YORK (CNS) — Set in a post-nuclear, 21st-century society, "Hardware" (Millimeter) tells of how the government unleashes killer cyborgs called Mark 13s on the populace, and people survive by scavenging for whatever they can tote home from the heavily irradiated zone nearby.

On just such a scavenging mission, Mo (Dylan McDermott) steals the discarded parts of a haywire Mark 13 to offer as a Christmas gift to his girlfriend, Jill (Stacey Travis), a scrap-metal sculptress.

After leaving her apartment he discovers the parts are still active, and as he heads back to rescue her the killer-cyborg reassembles itself and goes on a killing rampage.

Writer-director Richard Stanley's first

motion picture conveys a stark, futuristic look with arresting cinematography that douses and submerges the urban sets in darkly foreboding and jagged-angled designs reminiscent of German expressionism.

Most of all, the film fails because it appears to exist only to exploit its own violence — in ever-burgeoning instances — as the cyborg's poisoned, flesh-piercing prongs attack its victims and they in turn retaliate, culminating in a fevered pitch of dismemberment and gore.

Due to excessive violence, an extended sex scene with nudity, rough language and recreational drug use, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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