

UNFORGIVEN

Clint Eastwood is back in the saddle again. The last time *The Man With No Name* went the western route was in 1985's *Pale Rider*. Again serving as star, director and producer, Eastwood now returns to the wide open spaces for **Unforgiven**, a period drama also featuring Gene Hackman, Morgan Freeman and Richard Harris.

Eastwood plays William Munny, a farmer with a past. A former outlaw and killer, Munny has promised his wife he will mend his ways and even after her death, he continues to earn a meagre but honest living farming the prairie. But then his past comes back to haunt him, when Munny is asked to form a vigilante group to avenge an assault on a woman of ill repute in the town of Big Whisky. He rejoins his former partner,

Ned Logan (Freeman), and confronts the town's corrupt sheriff (Hackman) who has brutalized a bounty hunter (Harris) to discourage further revenge-seekers.

Playing the part of the fictional town of Big Whisky is Longview, Alta., with a population of several hundred and located approximately a half-hour's drive southwest of Calgary. For the most part, the close-knit community enjoyed playing host to the big Hollywood motion picture last fall. In addition to constructing a detailed late-19th-century Wild West set, the filmmakers pumped serious dollars into Longview's coffers, from the 10-room Twin Cities Hotel to the local gas station to the town butcher shop that supplied the production with \$400 worth of beef jerky.

While Eastwood's western roots go back to the late 1950s and TV's *Rawhide*, his first big break in movies saw him saddled with a decidedly non-equine animal, namely a slimy "gill-man" in

Revenge of the Creature, the 1955 sequel to *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*. His next motion picture role brought him significantly closer to his favored mode of transportation — playing opposite a talking mule in *Francis in the Navy*.

Eastwood's career took off a decade later thanks to a trio of "spaghetti westerns" directed by Sergio Leone. *A Fistful of Dollars*, followed by *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, established Eastwood as the quintessential tight-lipped western hero — a natural successor to Gary Cooper and John Wayne.

As the story goes, Leone originally wanted James Coburn for the lead in *A Fistful of Dollars*, but would have had to pay him a similar amount. After seeing an episode of *Rawhide*, Leone contacted Eastwood's agent who, in turn, called the then 33-year-old actor with the proposal, "Would you like to go to Europe and make an Italian-German-Spanish coproduc-

tion of a remake of a Japanese film in the plains of Spain?"

Eastwood initially replied, "Not particularly," but had a change of heart because he had never been to Europe and his wife wanted to go.

He would continue along the dusty trail in such memorable oaters as *Hang 'em High*, *High Plains Drifter* and *The Outlaw — Josey Wales*.

The Eastwood screen characters, according to the six-foot-four native San Franciscan, "are usually calloused men with a sensitive spot for right and wrong" and his **Unforgiven** character is no exception. After almost 40 years in the business, however, he still dislikes being the focus of attention.

"Maybe being an introvert gives me, by sheer accident, a certain screen presence, a mystique," the thoughtful Eastwood reasons. "People have to come and find out what's inside me."

Don Siegel, who directed Eastwood in several movies including *Dirty Harry*, once summed up the actor's understated approach rather succinctly. "The hardest thing in the world is to do nothing," said Siegel, "and he does it marvellously."

— Michael Rechtshaffen



WITH COWBOY JUNKIE CLINT EASTWOOD

Two aging gunslingers (Clint Eastwood and Morgan Freeman) come out of retirement to avenge the assault of a woman in Big Whisky.

