

Slick violence

by [Philip Christman](#) in the [Mar 14, 2001](#) issue

*Snatch* (2000), directed by Guy Ritchie

Guy Ritchie's *Snatch*, a British comedy (at least some of the audience was laughing), puts its disregard for human life right up front. We watch a jewel heist and massacre, some brutal beatings and a guy getting his face smashed with a hammer--all during the credits.

Go ahead, judge me, the film seems to be saying, Show how unhip you are. Well, violence is to be expected, especially in a story about two shady boxing promoters (Jason Statham and Stephen Graham) who lose their best fighter and replace him with the Irish vagabond (Brad Pitt) who beat up the first fighter in the first place. The new fighter doesn't understand the concept of a "fixed fight," which gets his promoters in hotter and hotter water. Also, there's a stolen jewel involved.

One of the few pleasures in this film is the intricacy of its plotting. It's like film noir on amphetamines. The film takes some risks with narrative structure, going out of sequence for a key scene. And Ritchie's visual and editing style, within its narrow range, is marvelous. The camera rushes unflappably from plot twist to plot twist using techniques that remind one of MTV, James Bond and the old *Batman* show put in a blender.

And the acting is good, given that all the characters are flat as pancakes. No one performance stands out, except Pitt's turn as the mumbling, incomprehensible Irish boxer. The characters deliver their multivalent threats and insults (as intricate as the plot) with the proper smirking or glowering demeanors.

But in the end, there's all that pointless violence. This film shows human barbarity without registering it; the tone never varies, whether we're watching a local gambling boss (Alan Ford) literally feed a character to his dogs or the Irish boxer confer with his buddies. It's as if everything is part of a big joke. *Pulp Fiction*--which this film often imitates in its look, subject matter and use of out-of-sequence narrative--seems like *It's a Wonderful Life* next to this movie, whose purpose is not to probe the lives of gangsters or help us understand its characters, but simply to

revel in its own slick, postmodern stylishness. A mighty waste of time and filmmaking talent.