

Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: Movie Review: ***The Village*** - A look at M. Night Shyamalan's latest – August 2004

The latest film from suspense master M. Night Shyamalan is a brooding drama called ***The Village***. The movie has a top-notch cast, including Joaquin Phoenix, Adrien Brody, William Hurt, Sigourney Weaver, Brendan Gleeson, and Bryce Dallas Howard in the pivotal role of Ivy Walker, the daughter of one of the town elders. The story is set in the small, quiet town of Covington Pennsylvania, which is surrounded by large and foreboding woods. The people of this isolated town live a simple and pleasant life; however they also live with a deep fear of the mysterious creatures that are said to reside in the nearby woods. When a headstrong young man named Lucius Hunt (Joaquin Phoenix) ventures into this unknown territory, it appears he has upset the long-standing peace between the villagers and the creatures. His actions may have changed the fate of the village and its people forever.

Generally when I write a movie review I start with the positive aspects (if any) of the film in question. This time I think it would be appropriate to begin in just the opposite fashion. Let me say right off the bat that I believe some viewers who are expecting a certain type of film are going to be very disappointed with ***The Village***. As mentioned above, M. Night Shyamalan has become known as a master of suspense, and his name is also mentioned quite a bit in horror film circles as well. This is because his past movies have involved supernatural chills and thrills. Also, people have come to expect a huge revelation, shock, or twist ending in his pictures. This is due largely to the fact that such was the case with all his previous movies, including ***Unbreakable***, and, most notably, ***The Sixth Sense***. A very high bar has indeed been set by these previous features. Without giving anything away, it's fair to say that the big revelation in ***The Village*** moves the movie into a completely different direction than one would expect or, possibly, hope

for. I'm calling this a negative aspect of the movie because I, being one of those people expecting a certain type of film, felt disappointed at what was revealed. While I wouldn't go so far as to say it completely ruined my enjoyment of the movie, it certainly wasn't in the neighborhood of what I had hoped for.

The above comments notwithstanding, this picture really does have a lot going for it. First and foremost it has excellent acting and high drama all wrapped up in a fairly original story idea. I was very involved with the characters and their plight. Adrien Brody and William Hurt are standouts as a somewhat retarded young man and a wise and thoughtful town elder, respectively. However the real star of the movie is Bryce Dallas Howard as Ivy Walker. She plays the role of a young and sensitive blind woman very convincingly, giving Ivy strength and more insight into things than any other character in the film. We see much of what happens in the film from her point of view. There are also some nice humorous moments thrown into the proceedings that lighten an otherwise serious mood. In addition, the movie has a very menacing atmosphere and great outdoor photography. The foreboding woods easily become a character in their own right.

It's hard to recommend or not recommend this movie. Generally speaking I'd say I liked it primarily for its originality and because of the fine cast. While many movie reviewers and moviegoers (probably younger audiences in particular) will most likely direct heavy criticism at the revelation in the film, I really give Mr. Shyamalan credit for having the guts to go in the direction he did with the story and stay true to his vision. Looking at things from the perspective of a horror/suspense fan however, I was disappointed. M. Night Shyamalan has become a specialist at the PG-13 thriller, but whether this movie will satisfy fans of that genre, considering the direction it moves in towards the end, remains to be seen.