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DREAMCATCHER

Just how unspeakably bad is the Stephen King adaptation *Dreamcatcher*? Allow me to present a few examples of opening sentences I was considering for this review:

• *"Dreamcatcher* features some lovely overhead shots of snow falling on northeastern pines, and a brief, magical interlude in which all manner of forest animals flee in terror from an unseen menace. There. That takes care of the film's merits."

• "Can the sublime Morgan Freeman triumph over any material, no matter how insipid? The answer, based on his work in *Dreamcatcher*, is 'I *thought* so, but ... .'"

• "*Dreamcatcher* makes so little sense that incoherence is practically its *subject*."

• “At one point in *Dreamcatcher*, Timothy Olyphant is seen relieving himself in the woods when a grotesque, toothy, worm-like creature pops out of the snow and sinks its fangs into Olyphant’s crotch. If my options were between that and having to endure this movie again, well ... I’d have to go with the worm.”

• “I saw *Kangaroo Jack*. I saw *A Guy Thing*. I saw Benigni’s *Pinocchio*, for God’s sake. *Dreamc atcher* is worse.”

What the hell happened here? How did director Lawrence Kasdan, working with screenwriter William Goldman and a cast that features, in addition to Freeman and Olyphant, Damian Lewis, Thomas Jane, Jason Lee, and Tom Sizemore, manage to create something this astonishingly inept? My initial impulse is to imagine this failure boiling down to the standard difficulties inherent in adapting a 600-page-plus novel into a two-hour film; obviously, a lot is going to be lost in the translation. But instead, I’m going to suggest that everything that’s awful about *Dream catcher* is pure Stephen King.

Consider: Four male friends (like in *Stand by Me*!) who meet at a secluded woodland cabin (like in *Misery*!) and share precognitive gifts (like in *Hearts in Atlantis*!) battle an evil subterranean creature (like in *It*!) with the ability to turn good guys into bad (like in *’Salem’s Lot*!). Meanwhile, Morgan Freeman quarantines a sleepy town infested with a fatal virus (like in *The Stand*!) and slowly goes mad (like in *The Shining*!). Add to all this blatant self-plagiarizing King’s notoriously amateurish dialogue, where every male speaks like a horny 12-year-old with Tourette’s, King’s decision to have his Uberworm, when assuming human form, call himself Mr. Gray and speak with a highfalutin British accent, and a beyond-ridiculous, where-did-*that*-come-from? ending, and you have a movie that the audience finds itself staring at, aghast, until the merciful arrival of the end credits. Hopefully, this diseased work will soon be stricken from everyone’s résumés, so we’ll waste no more time on it, except for one last opening sentence I thought about using, and the one that seemed the most appropriate: “After sitting through the

latest Lawrence Kasdan work, the news that Stephen King has announced his impending retirement filled me with uncontrollable joy, if only because we'll soon be spared any more cinematic experiences like
Dreamcatcher
."

THE CORE

The latest Stephen King opus is so serious about its profound stupidity that you have no choice but to laugh at it; by contrast, the cheesy sci-fi flick *The Core knows* how asinine it is, so you find yourself, against your better judgment, laughing
with
it. The earth's core has stopped spinning, you see, and only a ragtag group of scientists, madmen, and even a teenage computer geek can get it moving again before we're all fried by radioactive rays. Serious sci-fi fans, and serious
movie
fans, will probably find the film loathsome, but I'd be lying if I didn't admit to getting a bit of a kick out of it. The lunacy of the plotting and dialogue offers better laughs than you'll find in almost any other current release, and there's something thrilling about watching actors as diverse as Aaron Eckhart, Hilary Swank, Delroy Lindo, Richard Jenkins, Stanley Tucci, D.J. Qualls, and Alfre Woodard go at their roles with the hammy trash-brio of an Irwin Allen ensemble. The effects are shoddy, the story is silly, the jokes are cornball; it's
Armageddon
without the bombast. That lack of bombast, however, is what makes it kinda winning.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

In the female-empowerment comedy *View from the Top*, Gwyneth Paltrow is so nakedly striving for mainstream acceptance that she's rather touching. Paltrow must know that, despite her looks and charm, the mass audience doesn't exactly consider her a Bullock-ish snugglebug, so you can imagine her discovering this treacly little script – so drippy and contrived that you can easily picture Reese Witherspoon or Kirsten Dunst tossing it on the "Reject" pile – and shouting, "Yes! This'll make them love me!" In this graceless, one-note comedy about a woman chasing after her dreams of being a flight attendant, Gwyneth pratfalls, she shrieks, she wears revealing little bikini tops, she gets moony over a boyfriend, she stares the camera down with an "I'm gonna make it on my own" expression, and the result is both sweet and ineffably sad. This talented actress shouldn't appear in material that's too vapid for Selma Blair, and should never be forced to hide her quick wit; the last thing American movies need now is smart performers like Gwyneth Paltrow behaving like twitterbrains. With Mike Myers, Mark Ruffalo, Christina Applegate, Candice Bergen, and Joshua Malina being similarly confounded by Bruno Barreto's humorless direction, *View from the Top* is flaccid and joyless, a piddly attempt at mainstream escapism – Miramax style – that shows none of its participants in a good light.

TALK TO HER

Continuing the local trend of the best movies of 2003 actually being 2002 works that are finally arriving in the area, you won't find anything more wholly entertaining than Pedro Almodovar's *Talk to Her*, which just finished a week-long run at Moline's Nova 6 Cinemas and has now moved to the Quad Cities Brew & View. Anyone unfamiliar with the *oeuvre* of Pedro Almodovar, who just won the Oscar for this film's screenplay, might not, at first, be sure how to take the movie, which concerns two men (Javier Camara and Dario Grandinetti) who bond over their love of women in comas. What these viewers *will* soon glean is that Almodovar is one of the most original, fearless, brilliant artists working in film, and this bizarrely funny, achingly sad, sexually outré film shows him working at peak potential. His love for the movie's characters is completely nonjudgmental, the plot twists are shocking yet

completely satisfying, and it might not be until the drive home that you realize how much emotion Almodovar puts on the screen, and how wrenching and deeply
human
his worldview is.
Talk to Her
is full-to-brimming with splendid acting and a surfeit of unforgettable sequences – watch for the graphically symbolic silent movie – and anyone bemoaning the lack of originality and surprise in modern movies can't afford to miss it.