

Battling views at the box office

'From Hell' is good, after all

Literally, 'From Hell'

by Alec Styborski
staff writer



COURTESY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Johnny Depp and Heather Graham star in "From Hell."

by Jacob Boring
staff writer

"From Hell" is the latest film release to come from the acclaimed directors the Hughes Brothers ("Dead Presidents," "Menace II Society"). The film stars Johnny Depp ("Sleepy Hollow," "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas"), and Heather Graham ("Bowfinger," "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me").

few-week time period, Jack the Ripper committed five brutal murders, slaying and stealing organs from London prostitutes. The murders would make Jack the Ripper one of the most infamous serial killers of all time. Now in 2001, through the magic of cinematography, the story/legend of Jack the Ripper is captured in a way which fully demonstrates the vulgarity and gruesomeness of the crimes committed.

Depp plays Inspector Fred Abberline, who has strange psychic powers, which in connection to his powers of perception make him a great detective. Heather Graham plays Mary Kelly, a British prostitute, who happens to fall in love with Abberline and who must also rely on him for protection. Not to give any clues away as to which character is Jack the Ripper, it is best simply to say that the actor who plays the part has been in more films than either Depp or Graham.

After the first 25 minutes of the film I thought it sucked, but after a

while longer it picked up. I cannot say the film is the greatest (that is to say I don't predict it to win any major awards) but some of the images captured truly express cinematography as an art form. The story is interesting enough, even going so deep as to capture an understanding of the politics of England at the time and fully expressing the motives behind the murders of Jack the Ripper. The imagery is truly spectacular, though as dark as the story itself.

The acting is also excellent. I did find that some of the imagery seemed unnecessary for the story, though. It seemed that some of the imagery was simply there to add darkness or gore to the film, in spite of what seems to possibly be a slight overuse of camera techniques and captured dreamlike images. The film is rated R for strong violence and gore, language, sexuality, and drug content.

★ ★ ★
out of 4

The Hughes Brothers have made another film about a poor, lower class society, although "From Hell" does not take place in Los Angeles' Watts, but the east side of London's poverty stricken Whitechapel district. The territory was not foreign to the brothers but the story was, and it is quite obvious, because this film becomes an unbearable, messy story. Consequently, "From Hell" should go back to where it came from.

"From Hell" traces back in history to 1888 London, in order to capture the feel, reign, and terror one of the most infamous serial killers of all time. Jack the Ripper, who was thought to be an educated man because of the way he gruesomely killed at least five prostitutes.

This film is modeled from Alan Moore's 500-page graphic novel (also titled "From Hell"), that is based more on theories than on facts about Jack the Ripper's horrific killing spree at the end of 1888. For example, in the film and graphic novel "From Hell," the demented killer is caught and brought to justice. Actually, the killer was never found, and historians can only make assumptions about who the murderer really was.

Since the killer is apprehended in this film, of course, a young and handsome inspector must be hired to do an outstanding job. In comes Inspector Fred Abberline (Johnny Depp), the drug-induced soothsayer who is hired by the London police in order to prevent Jack the Ripper from continuing his killing escapade through London. To catch the murderer, Abberline must smoke as much opium as possible in order to predict who, what, where, and when the murders will take place. Well, that is how the inspector solves the unsolved crime of the century, and it works in this absurd, somewhat-factual film.

Of course, this is just a Hollywood film made for entertainment purposes, and should be a fun movie that will leave you with high body counts, lots of blood, some sex

and drugs. Unfortunately, the film succeeds in all of the previous key essentials to a Hollywood movie, and that is why this film fails miserably.

A true story, especially a historical story about distraught and deprived people, should not be altered and tampered with to become a stylized slasher film that every kid wishes to see because of the "Scream" trilogy. The film ends up focusing on the slasher film genre far too much, which is really too bad, because the film never develops a psychological aspect like many other great serial killer films such as "Silence of the Lambs," "M," "Seven," or even "The Cell."

If there is one redeeming quality about this film, it has to be the nightmarish atmosphere, in which Jack the Ripper's shadow crawls and floats throughout the fog-filled allies, as he stalks his prey. The atmosphere is also supported by a ghastly skyline that bleeds a deep red to perfectly portray London's petrified populace as instable and hysterical, which is a remarkable metaphor to depict Jack the Ripper's infliction of torment and distress upon the civilians of London. The sky is a hideous, bloody mess, but at the same time, it seems to become a beautiful painting that comes alive with exuberant color. The photography is a work of art by the brilliant cinematographer Peter Deming (ironically, the cinematographer of "Scream 2" and "Scream 3"), and adds a lot to the overall production value of the film.

If you want to see a slasher film that will entertain your eyes and not your mind, go see this movie. On the other hand, if you want to see a film with substance and accuracy, do not go out of your way to view this film. In the end, the film's interpretation and translation lead this film to where it came from, and even the picturesque cinematography cannot be its savior.

★ out of 4

'Monsters, Inc.' - enormously funny

by Daniel Stasiewski
staff writer

How close to perfection can an animated film get? Well, "Monsters, Inc." can answer that question. Pixar and Disney's newest collaboration goes beyond most Hollywood productions this year, both technically and dramatically.

With boundless imagination, "Monsters, Inc." does for closet monsters what "Toy Story" did for toys. And it does that while surpassing every other computer-animated film ever made.

"Monsters, Inc." is Monstropolis' power plant. The entire city's energy is both distributed and harnessed at the plant. But where do they get the energy? From the screams of scared children, of course. The job isn't easy since children are assumed toxic to monsters. One braver scarer is James P. Sullivan (otherwise known as Sully). Even with his life on the line, he does everything in his power to keep the screams coming during Monstropolis' energy shortage. With the help of his fellow worker Mike Wazowski, Sully is on the verge of breaking the all-time scaring record. Close on his heels, however, is the slimy Randall Boggs. The two are snout-and-snout everyday, but Sully always comes out screaming. Sully's success even impresses the CEO of "Monsters, Inc.," Henry J. Waterhouse, who is worried the power shortage will end his reign at the top of the company.

One night after the plant is closed, Sully finds a closet door still sitting on the Scaring Floor. He checks to see if there is a monster inside, and in the process, lets a child into the monster world. When Sully tries to get the child back inside, Randall appears with a cartful of empty scream cells (the bottles that harness screams), and Sully is forced to flee. Soon, Sully discovers that Randall

was up to more than just scaring and finds himself trying to save the child, instead of frightening it.

Right from the 50s sitcom opening credits, I could tell "Monsters, Inc." was a different film, even for Pixar. The basic concept of every Pixar film is to take a believable human circumstance and put it into a fantasy world. The colorful and artistic characters are directed toward children, while the humanity of a toy's story or a bug's life is perfect for the adult audience. "Monsters, Inc." has all that and more.

Every joke is a superior combination of the subtle and in your face. Pixar has mastered this Mel Brooks-esque humor and made it its own.

The humor isn't what sells this film, though. The relationships and consequential disagreements are so improved in "Monsters, Inc." these monsters seem more human than most of the human characters in other motion pictures.

This resilience can be found in each of the film's characters. Sully is one of the most well-developed characters in the history of animated film. In the beginning, Sully's life is all about scaring. He lives for it. If he had a compulsive obsession with actually being at work, I would call him workaholic. When this child enters his life, it all changes. His concern for work turns into paternal protection issues. These issues arise within the dark clash between Sully and Randall.

The battle between the two competing monsters is attributable to a proletarian working place. Advancement doesn't seem like it happens often, but Randall sees the power shortage as a key to his moving ahead. When Randall's plot to make it to the top is exposed, we see just how far he has to go in order to advance to "Monsters, Inc."

For any parent concerned with their child being scared of monsters,

you're looking at the wrong feature of the film. Watching the child squeal in terror from the Randall's torturous contraption caused the only crying incidence from a toddler. This dark conflict almost goes too far for a family film.

From an adult perspective, though, I wouldn't ask for a single change. And then there's Mike. Billy Crystal is inside this character like I've never seen in an animated film. The slapstick highlights and minor relationship insights provided by Mike are only amplified by the comedic genius that supplies his voice. It's impossible not to laugh at the little green sidekick.

The technical advancements are almost overshadowed by the drama and humor of the rest of the film, but they are just too gorgeous to ignore. The backgrounds look like they are out of a live action film, but they didn't steal the landscapes, like Disney's "Dinosaur." Every detail from a pipe on a wall to a slime trail (not forgetting this is a movie about monsters) is immaculate. The characters are even more scrupulously articulated than the scenery. From the slightest changes in Mike's skin tone to Sully's fur blowing in the wind, a more detailed animated film has never been created.

When I first saw Sully, I thought he was a Jim Henson creation. As for the children, Pixar has come a long way from the baby in "Tin Toy." The visual aspects alone put this computer-animated feature above all its predecessors.

Rarely is a film as entertaining and insightful as "Monsters, Inc." Forget about "Shrek" because "Monsters, Inc." is the only must-see animated film this year. If you don't see this movie, it would be a monstrous mistake.

★ ★ ★
out of 4

'Monsters, Inc.' - definitely ugly

by Ben Herwatic
staff writer

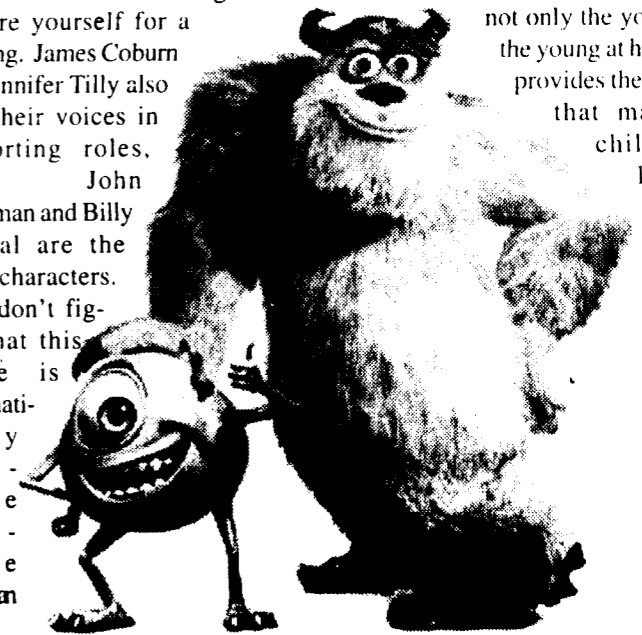
The worst thing about "Monsters, Inc." was how hard it was to buy tickets and the fact that little kids were everywhere causing a ruckus.

In the city of Monstropolis, "Monsters, Inc." is the leading power provider, getting its energy from the screams of little children that are scared from the monsters that come out of their closet. James P. Sullivan, also known as Sully, and his best friend and scaring assistant Mike are the top scaring team at Monsters, Inc. Humans are the only thing which monsters believe to be bad, evil, and toxic. When a little girl accidentally follows Sully back into his world, Monstropolis is thrown into chaos and anything can happen.

"Monsters, Inc." is your near-cliche of computer animated family movies. This one was done by Pixar, which is a division of Disney, and came from the same guys who produced "Toy Story." Technically, "Monsters" is a step above in the animation department compared to "Toy Story" and pretty much any other Pixar film. "Monsters" required nearly 2.5 million rendermarks, or computing power, compared to the 1.1 million used on "Toy Story 2." The biggest difference is the individuality of every single hair on the bodies of the biggest, hairiest monsters. If you like these movies, don't worry. "Monsters, Inc." is only the second movie of the five picture deal between the two studios.

"Monsters, Inc." has its share of stars and if you are like me and believe that Steve Buscemi makes any movie worth watching, then prepare yourself for a viewing. James Coburn and Jennifer Tilly also lend their voices in supporting roles, while John Goodman and Billy Crystal are the main characters. Now don't figure that this movie is automatically horrible because Goodman

and adults, while making reference to and spoofing many things which small children wouldn't understand. "Monsters, Inc." is geared towards not only the young but the young at heart and provides the lesson that making children laugh



'Monsters, Inc.' is now in all theaters across the U.S.

is in it. In fact, this is his best acting since his role in "The Big Lebowski" in 1997. He plays the part of a big scary monster well. The Academy Award-winning producer John Lasseter and Grammy Award-winning composer Randy Newman lend their talents as well.

The well-made, G-rated family flick is a good all-around movie, but the year's earlier computer animated film "Shrek" was superior by far. "Shrek" was geared towards a variety of audiences including children

is a lot more satisfying than making them cry.

If you have two hours to spare, don't mind little kids everywhere and can find a non-sold out theater near you, "Monsters, Inc." might be worth your while if you don't have anything else to do.

★ ★ out of 4

New Releases

<p>Movies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone' - 'The Wash' 	<p>Video*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'America's Sweethearts' - 'Osmosis Jones' - 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider' 	<p>Music*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'The Cure: (Greatest Hits)' - 'Barenaked Ladies: (Greatest Hits)' - 'Garth Brooks' 	<p>DVD*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'America's Sweethearts' - 'X-Files: Season 4' - 'Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory'
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*Release Date: 11/16
Special thanks to Media Play for providing information

'Spanish Nights'

Music of passion, romance and all things Spanish will delight you as the Erie Philharmonic Orchestra and maestro Hugh Keelan take the stage to present "Spanish Nights," Saturday at the Warner Theatre. This music of French and Spanish composers suggests the intensity of flamenco dance, with its driving rhythms and blinding speed. Guitars, swirling bright colored dresses, the clicking of castanets and the smothering smokiness of the Moorish culture are gathered in these fascinating musical images.

Back by popular demand is internationally acclaimed pianist Santiago Rodriguez. A native of Cuba, Rodriguez first performed with the New Orleans Philharmonic at the age of 10. Last season he brilliantly performed Rachmaninov's "Second Piano Concerto" with the Erie Philharmonic and is now returning to present Manuel de Falla's "Nights in the Gardens of Spain" for piano and orchestra. Also on the program is Turina's "The Bullfighter's Prayer," Maurice Ravel's "Alborado del Gracioso" ("The Jester's Morning Song"), Franz Liszt's "Rhapsodie Espagnole" for piano and orchestra, and Claude Debussy's "Iberia," his dreamland setting of the dramatic Spanish peninsula.

The performance begins at 8 p.m. at the Warner Theatre. Ticket prices start at \$22. Group, student and senior discounts are available. Call (814) 455-1375 or visit the Erie Philharmonic Orchestra Box Office at 1006 State St.