

Editorial:

An Old Fashioned Trip to the Movies?

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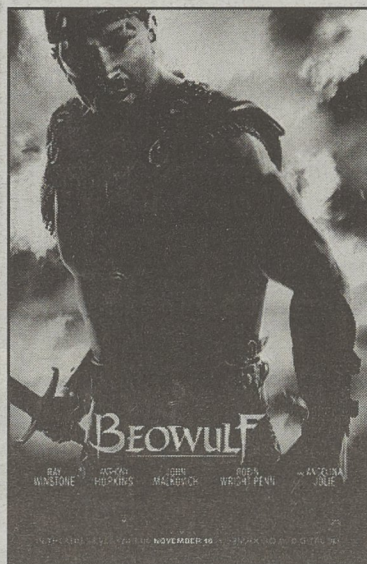
Over the past 19 years of my life, many of my fondest memories have been made at my home town Cineplex, Carmike Cinema 8. It was here that I saw "Star Wars" for the first time, here that I had my first real date, and here that I experienced the magic of an enthusiastic audience. It was also here that I discovered the power of action, science fiction, horror, and most of all, drama. It was here that I learned not just about a visual connection to film but also an emotional one. So, it was only fitting that I return to my sacred theatre over Thanksgiving break. In fact, I made two visits.

My first screening was "Beowulf", Robert Zemeckis' (the director behind "Back to the Future" and "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?") 3-D CGI adaptation of the classic epic poem that we all suffered through in high school. The second film was another adaptation of a classic story, "The Mist." This film by Frank Darabont (the director of "The Shawshank Redemption") is the big screen version of Stephen King's 1980 novella.

With "Beowulf", I was ready for a fun afternoon at the movies. Walking into the theatre, I was confident that the film would be an amazing visual spectacle. The previews had looked fantastic. I was also confident that a capable director like Zemeckis and capable screenwriter like Roger Avery (co-writer of "Pulp Fiction") would be able to inject a level of substance and meaning that was lacking in the original epic poem. I was correct with my first assumption.

The 3-D effects and visuals in "Beowulf" are nothing short of breath taking. Dragons, sea monsters, and even a half naked Angelina Jolie blast forth towards the audience in stunning 3-D glory. The new age technique of using real actors and then animating over top of them proves quite impressive as well.

The computer generated characters bare uncanny resemblances to the film's all star cast which includes Anthony Hopkins, Angelina Jolie, and Ray Winstone. "Beowulf" is a very entertaining action adventure film and the actors seem to be having a blast. Winstone (best known as Mr. French in "The Departed") seems to be having a particularly good



The movie, "Beowulf", based on the epic poem, provides a CGI filled mythological adventure of non-stop action and entertainment.

time as the titular hero.

Unfortunately, the action and fun characters are all that keep the film afloat. The plot is your basic warrior kills monsters and saves the day story, but so is the poem. However, when I discovered that the ancient hero in the film differed somewhat from the one in the poem, I saw great potential. The hero of the ancient poem is a fearless hero with no real weakness, but Zemeckis' Beowulf is a warrior with a flaw. He has a bit of a soft spot for the ladies. Beowulf is a fearless fighter when it comes to big scaly beasts, but he proves to be no match for Angelina Jolie as the beautiful mother of his monstrous enemy, Grendel. I was very intrigued by this, but soon found myself being disappointed. The introduction of Beowulf's flaw proves to be the only real dramatic substance of the film. Also, our hero's intriguing soft spot is not explored half as much it could have

been and it quickly takes a back seat to the dragons and sea monsters. Don't get me wrong I enjoy an action picture as much as the next guy, but that is really all that the film is. For weeks, I saw previews calling "Beowulf", "the future of cinema", but if the future means all visual effects and little to no emotional ones, it may not be so bright. Though entertaining, this Thanksgiving flick proved to have lots of stuffing but little meat.

A few days later, I traveled back to Carmike Cinema 8. This time I saw Stephen King's "The Mist." To be honest, I wasn't sure what to expect from this film. The acting looked strong and that was what drew me to it, but a film about people trapped in a mysterious mist reminded me a little too much of "The Fog" and that was not a film that I particularly wanted to see again. But I held my breath and took the plunge. Fortunately, this was not "The Fog." "The Mist" is the story of a small town in Maine that becomes covered in a mysterious mist after a violent storm.

The locals are gathered at the grocery store grabbing last minute supplies when the thick mist rolls in. No one knows for sure what is out there, but the screams of those who didn't make it into the store tell them they probably shouldn't go outside. Inside the store, you have a gaggle of townsfolk from all walks of life. You have big time artist and loving father, David Drayton (Thomas Jane) and his young son, Billy. You have the local mechanic (William Sadler), the grocery store employees, the big shot lawyer who no one likes (Andre Brauer) and the old folks of the town. Then there is Miss Carmody (Marcia Gay Harden), the town's crazy religious zealot.

Regardless of different social statuses and beliefs, all of the people in the store must band together in order to survive whatever is lurking in the mist. The film takes its time with revealing what exactly is out there. The camera angles are somewhat reminiscent of "Jaws", using little

glimpses of the creatures all leading up to a stunning reveal. There is more than one thing lurking outside the grocery store. Make no mistake; "The Mist" is a creature feature. The creatures in the film are a collection of large mutated insects accidentally released from another dimension by the military.

I know what you are thinking, corny. I was thinking that also, but I was dead wrong. The creatures in "The Mist" are truly frightening. The evil grinned spiders, tentacle covered creatures, and vulture like beasts all managed to send a chill up my spine. The reason for this is the extremely realistic looking CGI used to create the monsters. The effects are completely seamless. The creatures are beautiful and horrific at the same time. Even more horrific than the monsters outside, however, are the monsters lurking inside of the townsfolk.

"The Mist" is really a story about people and how they change during chaotic situations. David Drayton says it best. "You



The action, horror and suspense brought forth in Stephen King's "The Mist" will keep audiences on the edge of their seat in anticipation.

put people in the dark, you scare them, and then you see how primitive they get." As time goes on, and more and more people fall victim to the creatures in the mist, those inside begin to change. Sides are drawn. Many join Miss

Carmody on her religious crusade which puts the rest of the town folk in danger. Carmody believes that the mist is actually God's way of taking vengeance on mankind and the only way to appease Him is to present a sacrifice. Their first choice is little Billy Drayton. These once caring and friendly people are now ready to spill the blood of an innocent child in order to save themselves.

The film asks an excellent question. What happens when it all comes down to survival? What is man willing to do to survive? Are we really any different the creatures in the mist? "The Mist" works as a horror film because it provides both visual and psychological scares. It also does something that "Beowulf" could not. It makes a genuine connection with the audience. I saw "The Mist" with a group of friends in a somewhat crowded theatre. Judging from the reactions of the audience, however, you would have thought that it was completely packed. The whole theatre clapped and cheered when Miss Carmody meets her doom, there were several screams heard during the creature sequences, and the entire audience gasped in unison at the film's mind numbing ending.

A few days before this, I had seen "Beowulf" in a completely packed theatre. There were no cheers, no screams; just silence. The film drew the audience in visually, but there was no emotional connection.

Now after seeing the box office returns for the two films, I am somewhat worried. "Beowulf" continues to climb up the charts while "The Mist" will most likely be considered a financial flop. If visually entertaining romps with no soul are to be the future of cinema, what reason will I have to travel back to my beloved theatre.

All of the magic will be gone.

