

Cate Blanchett sees dead people and Katie Holmes' breasts

JOHN ZEISS
reviews editor

The one big surprise to come out of the new pseudo-horror thriller *The Gift* doesn't jump out at the main character from behind a door. No, the real shocker is that it actually took Hollywood this long to try to weakly imitate *The Sixth Sense*. That movie took horror films back (at least momentarily) from the teen crowd that had a death grip (no pun intended) on the genre in the mid-'90s. Now horror movies are safe for adults again, and the road is paved for a long line of *Sixth Sense* wannabes that, like *The Gift*, probably won't get anywhere near the level of sophisticated movie-making of that sleeper hit from last year.

From the outset, the cast of *The Gift* leaves the film no room for error. With this much talent involved, you go in expecting greatness. Oscar nominee Cate Blanchett plays Annie, a psychic whose gift is both appreciated and hated in the backwoods, heavily Christian Georgia town where she lives. Among the appreciators are, a battered wife (Oscar winner Hilary Swank) who won't listen to Annie's advice to leave her husband. (She needs a psychic to tell her that?) Among the haters are said husband Donnie (Oscar nominee when hell freezes over Keanu Reeves), who calls Annie a witch and Satanist and threatens that she's next on his whuppin' list.

As if being in the middle of others' marital problems wasn't enough, all of the sudden the prettiest lil' thing in town, Jessica (Katie Holmes), is missing only months before she's set to marry Wayne (Oscar nominee Greg Kinnear). The cops are stumped, so they turn to Annie. Again, in "were psychic powers really needed to come up with this?" territory, Annie points her finger to a guy with a history of vio-

lence against women — Donnie — who just happened to be having an affair with the missing girl. But is it that simple?

No one in the big ensemble cast, which also includes Giovanni Ribisi and Michael Jeter, gives a bad performance. Even Keanu's Southern accent isn't too bad. Nor is Blanchett's, which is even more impressive since she's a Brit. And Swank looks exactly like every drunk woman you've ever seen at 3 a.m. at a Waffle House, complete with a mullet and tight leather pants.

So the problem obviously lies with the director, Sam Raimi. He should know better — his last film, *A Simple Plan*, was a cold, stark and, well, simple, American masterpiece. What drove that film was all too real: human greed, and how it can tear away at even familial bonds. What drives *The Gift* is the supernatural. Depending on your beliefs about life and death, you can decide on that one for yourself.

Oh, the breasts: Yes, Katie Holmes bears them, but even that shouldn't sucker you into spending your seven bucks. In an example of the speed of modern technology that's scarier than anything in the movie, stills from those scenes are already up on the Internet.

The Gift
Starring Cate Blanchett,
Katie Holmes, Keanu
Reeves
Joey's boobs!!!!!!!!!!!!

5



FILE PHOTO

See, this is what happens when you save the world from evil computers. You get drunk with power, stop shaving and start beating your wife. Real heroic there, Neo.

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels Two

JOHN ZEISS
reviews editor

When a director's second movie barely differs from his first, it's a sad thing. When a director is known more for who he just married than for his films, it's a sad thing. So it follows that *Snatch*, the new film by Guy Ritchie (better known as "that British guy who just got hitched to Madonna"), is a sad thing. Two hours full of senseless violence made cool, and not a single new idea. Great.

The plot is nearly impossible to lay out in a short review. Suffice it to say that everything revolves around a huge diamond with the ability to make its potential possessor (or possessors) very rich. A big cast of characters are fighting like dogs for the diamond. Unless you're here studying abroad from England, about the only characters you are going to recognize in that rat race are Franky Four Fingers (Benicio Del Toro) and Mickey (Brad Pitt). Other than those two, it's just a bunch of limey blokes.

If you saw Ritchie's first film, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, then you've seen *Snatch*. Differences between the two boil down to the minute. *Lock Stock* was an alright, little out-of-nowhere indie flick (although the glorification of violence in it was irksome, as well),

Snatch
Starring Brad Pitt
and Benicio Del Toro

The British
Tarantino seems
headed down
Quentin's same path
of quick career
burnout.

5

but it never managed to rise above art-house word-of-mouth status. Ritchie obviously thought, "Throw one huge American star and one rising American star in what is essentially the exact same film, and this time I'll hit it big across the pond. Genius!"

Del Toro's character doesn't hang around long, so he can't do much to help the movie. He's much better in *Traffic*, so if you're looking for a movie to catch on a Saturday night, see that instead. Pitt's just up to his shirtless boxing again. He also did that in the much better *Fight Club*, so if you're looking to waste some time, go rent that instead.

Snatch is fast, funny recycled material. Just call it *Lock, Stock and Three Smoking Barrels*.

VIDEO PICK: Radioland Murders

ANDREW WASCOM
Arcade editor

The '90s were hard on George Lucas. Between *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) and *The Phantom Menace* (1999), there wasn't much noise coming from Skywalker Ranch. However, in 1994 Mr. Lucas released a film with little fanfare that soon faded into the shelves of your local Blockbuster. *Radioland Murders* is a witty, fun movie that's definitely worth a few bucks.

Set in 1939 in the studios of WBN, a national radio station preparing to go on the air, *Radioland Murders* is a combination of vaudeville and murder mystery. The eponymous crimes are committed during an important live broadcast, in a way similar to that of Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians*.

Mary Stuart Masterson plays a tough, assertive executive assistant trying to keep everything under control, while her husband (played by Brian Benben, the guy from HBO's *Dream On*) tries to solve the mystery.

The dialogue is clever, and the entire movie seems like it could have come straight from an old radio serial. The portrayals of those radio plays should amuse anyone familiar with classics like *The Lone Ranger* and the melodramatic soap operas.

Radioland Murders is well-written, funny and even a bit suspenseful. Though the humor is by no means subtle and the story odd, it marks enough triumph from the man who brought us Darth Vader.