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## The Happening - DVD

### Frighteningly bad treat for Halloween?

by Neil Queen published on 31 October 2008

This year's Oscars showed us that now, more than ever, films are being made to a standard that matches any period in Hollywood's golden history. This means that whenever you go see or rent a new film you may be watching a bona fide classic in the making.

About half an hour into *The Happening*, a wave of genuine excitement came over me - am I bearing witness to the birth of another legend? Am I watching one of the worst films ever made?

It didn't start out that way. Mark Wahlberg plays a science teacher who finds himself in the middle of a major incident, initially feared to be a terrorist attack, which involves a mass attack on the nervous systems of New York residents, causing them to kill themselves. It's unsettling, with plenty of unsavoury death scenes that have an unnerving but hypnotic tranquillity. So initially we have a beautifully-shot tense psycho-drama about a hidden enemy destroying America in a novel way that seemed to offer a certain intensity.

See, it soon transpires that Mother Nature's behind the attacks, a neat enough idea that could, with dynamism, a nice bit of CGI and a pinch of satire, have made for an engaging 90 minutes. What you instead have is an absolute dog's dinner.

Now, the idea of a bad film isn't definitive, many people enjoy bad films, lord knows I do, while Tarantino is apparently a huge fan of *Showgirls*. But I can forgive a bad film made by someone who either lacks skill or imagination, as the odds are against them, and their flawed efforts can ultimately be endearing, but what for me constitutes a bad film is somebody who has the ability and tools to make good art, and whose worst efforts should still be average, yet somehow manages to come up with a stinker.



...cont.

That takes some doing - it's like Lewis Hamilton driving a car into a ditch. With *Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*, Shyamalan showed he knows what it takes to make a major blockbuster, yet here, I really struggle to think of what he, as writer and director, didn't louse up.

Seemingly content with the film's concept and the conceit of the preachy eco message, he makes no attempt to make it watchable, entertaining or to successfully manipulate our feelings beyond the initial shocks. As Wahlberg and his sadly 2D partner Alma (Zooey Deschanel) embark on a road movie to safety, it's really hard to care.

The casting and performances are lacklustre, the characters are either caricature nerds who exist only to provide science info that could back up Shyamalan's theory or serve little purpose, the plot and dialogue are stupid, ill-thought out, and lacking in any warmth that could sell the characters or story to us, plus it is packed with moments of real absurdity delivered with a misplaced gravitas that are genuinely laughable - look out Marky Mark, a possibly vengeful field of grass is propelling a virus your way!

## VERDICT

But once any possible perverse guffaws have been had, nothing remains. The biggest problem is that it fails to provide any real excitement or entertainment that could have tempered any of the overly weighty portent.

At its core is the premise that nature has its mysteries that are just beyond our understanding, no matter how hard we seek to solve them. Following that lead, I've given up trying to work out how a film that could have been perfectly acceptable ended up going so badly wrong.

Rating: 15

Starring: Mark Wahlberg, Zooey Deschanel

Directed by: M Night Shyamalan

Extras: Featurettes, making of, deleted scenes, gag reels (special editions)

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## At a glance

### What is it?

Suspense eco-drama

### Good

That frisson of twisted glee as you wonder whether this is really as bad as your eyes and ears are telling you

### Bad

The fact that in this time of economic crisis, some people have and will waste money on this film

### Verdict

Simply the dulllest, most ridiculous, most bloated, ineffectual, nonsensical film I have had the misfortune to ever savour

**Price** 19.99 / two-disc special edition &#pound;22.99 / Blu-ray &#pound;24.99

**Our score**

**2/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**