

## “THE BARRENS” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Chris Haberman  
Monday, 08 October 2012 14:15

---



The Jersey Devil is a fun crytzoological critter to consider, and fortunately, Darren Lynn Bousman’s THE BARRENS (out tomorrow on DVD and Blu-ray/DVD combo from Anchor Bay) has managed to utilize the beast to become something rare these days: an original creature feature that respects both its characters *and* audience...for the most part.

Richard Vineyard, played by Stephen Moyer (TRUE BLOOD’s Bill), takes his weirded-out family to the infamous Pine Barrens—where the N.J. Devil is said to roam—for a trip that’s supposed to help heal some mysterious emotional wounds that have put a strain on everyone. Stepmom (Mia Kirshner) and teenage daughter (Allie MacDonald) don’t get along, and the enigmatic 6-year-old son (Peter DaCunha) has lost his dog, which they’ve been trying very hard to find. The getaway turns out to suck: All Richard wants is to get back to the great outdoors he once enjoyed with his old man, but instead, the crowded campsite has become a haven for tourists—all young, loud and obnoxious, fiddling with their phones and playing a loud racket. Richard immediately starts having flashbacks and bizarre panic attacks.



From the trailer, I have to admit I was anticipating a ripoff of THE SHINING; what I got was almost more of an ANTICHRIST Lite by way of a NIGHT SHIFT-era Stephen King short story. Yeah, there is some Jack Torrance stuff that goes down (Dad scares family), but Moyer plays his deterioration as more painful and confused than Jack Nicholson’s zany madman. Indeed, while every character had the potential to be annoying—the flick requires much crying, screaming, running and falling—everyone does their best to keep the shrillness factor in check, which means you can stay in the story without plugging your ears or wishing the worst for anyone.

The script contains some clever tricks that are appreciated, and I’m talking more twists than jump-scares. Then you have the red stuff: Shredded animals and humans pop up throughout. Like a few other bits I won’t spoil, these could’ve been rendered impotent by absurd CGI, but instead, practical FX are employed as much as possible, and for that, I’m very grateful. Writer/director Bousman and cinematographer Joseph White’s camera really doesn’t stop

## “THE BARRENS” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Chris Haberman

Monday, 08 October 2012 14:15

---

moving, putting you in Richard’s addled shoes without getting too nauseating or headache-inducing (*à la* certain SAW sequences). I also truly appreciated the audio design—the sound of a dead animal being pushed into water is still haunting me the morning after sitting with the flick.

There are only a few odd choices that throw things off. A wonderfully eerie and well-done intro is immediately followed by a horribly embarrassing TRUE BLOOD-style title sequence. Like, someone needs to be put in a corner for those credits—then whacked by Rustin Parr/the Blair Witch. There are a few scenes involving less-than-convincing intestines, but hey, intestines! Hooray! Lastly, the score by Bobby Johnston (KING OF THE ANTS, MOTHER’S DAY) constantly permeates the soundscape, heavily evoking Nathan Barr’s work on TRUE BLOOD, and the bending violins start to distract rather than enhance. I may sound like a broken record here, but it’s very difficult to soak in that score while watching Moyer do his best *not* to be Bill.

As for the special features, we’re given a commentary track with Bousman and White, as well as a single deleted scene—a wisely discarded alternate ending for the foreign release. A commentary with the two gents for this conclusion is worth a look ‘n’ listen for anyone with a morbid interest in silly, tacked-on final “tags” that are felt necessary for certain audiences (THE DESCENT come to mind, though in this scenario, it’s the opposite—the more effective ending was left alone for U.S. audiences, for a change). The full-length commentary reveals that Bousman has been trying to get this little flick made ever since he did SAW II, and that it was filmed in Toronto instead of on the legendary N.J. monster’s true stamping grounds. White had spent time in the Barrens as a youth, and had to consult with Bousman, who was dedicated to representing the landscape accurately.

The two also note that this was certainly intended to be a losing-your-mind movie rather than a jump-scare flick, and they do bring up THE SHINING and JAWS as influences—which is appreciated, as they cannot be denied. Bousman and White also poke fun at the fact that the former, coming off of his ridiculously successful stint participating in the SAW franchise, hooked up with the latter to make the subsequent MOTHER’S DAY and BARRENS, which saw Bousman go from 3,000-screen releases to 30-screen releases to “10-screen releases to four-screen releases now—to [THE BARRENS’] zero-screen release.” Speaking of figures, the shoot was cut from 31 days to 20, and all the difficulties (notably relentless rain) throughout are as lovingly recollected here as possible. The duo seem to have survived, though the jovial Bousman seems a bit worse for wear (in addition to the emotional fatigue of the film, he admits to having just gotten off a plane) and isn’t too sure Moyer “will ever talk to [him] again,” as they both had higher hopes for the film.

## “THE BARRENS” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Chris Haberman

Monday, 08 October 2012 14:15

---

This, of course, is the best kind of commentary: brutally honest, humbled and inspiring. Making movies isn't easy—duh—but as Bousman puts it, “There's two ways to do a commentary. There's the bullshit version where you can tell everyone, ‘Oh, we shot this on a 35mm blah, blah, blah...’ or you can tell the hardships and struggles, because I think as a filmmaker, that's what I wanna know.” Correctamundo—that goes for the audience, too. It's difficult to get into many more specifics that the pair discuss without spilling some spiffy beans, but I was tickled to learn that medical accuracy was adhered to. And that, in a film about a tortured family and a winged demon-beast, a fart machine was used to evoke a reaction or two.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷👤

DISC PACKAGE: 🍷🍷🍷👤