

Lincoln scares up haunted houses, hayrack rides

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of five stories that look at artistic and entertaining aspects of Halloween.

BY TONY MOSES

As with most years, there is more to fear in Lincoln than masses of trick-or-treaters pounding the streets in search of candy.

Mad scientists and talking corpses have taken over Nightmare on 16th Street, while screaming brides and dead rock stars have made their home in the Acreage Zoo in the ghost town of Old Jamaica.

The two "haunted" businesses take different approaches to try to spook Lincoln residents with various ghoulish beings.

The Jamaica Haunted Forest Hayrack Ride, on the southern edge of Wilderness Park at 2601 Saltillo Road, offers tours of the town of terror for \$5.

The name may be a bit deceiving because the ride is no trip to tropical paradise.

Instead, groups are seated in a trailer filled with hay and pulled through the haunted grounds by a tractor.

The ride itself is frightening enough as the tractor pulls the trailer over steep hills and around sharp curves on a narrow, dimly lit path.

When the trailer first departs, the distant city lights of Lincoln provide an orange glow to outline dead trees, vacant buildings and abandoned cars.

As the ride progresses, the trailer passes scenes of terror, including flesh-eating brides and gutted rock stars.

The monsters often find time to follow the trailer, offering riders a chance to sample some flesh or trying to take a rider's appendage back to their haunted lair.

When the monsters are not bargaining for flesh with the riders, they sometimes create a diversion so other maniacs can appear from the woods and jolt riders with screams and chain saws.

At one point in the ride, the trailer enters a dark tunnel, where riders are locked in and left as bait for whatever monsters find them.

The ride was not the only place where monsters lurked.

A headless horseman and witch prowled the grounds, while riders waited for their trailer of terror to arrive.

For an adventurer looking for a fun time, the Jamaica Haunted Forest Hayrack Ride is well worth the drive.

At the Nightmare on 16th Street, more conventional ghouls restlessly wait for the next squeamish victim to enter their haunted domain.

Nightmare, 126 N. 16th St., offers visitors an about five-minute tour through a maze of haunted rooms.

The price for the tour is \$8.

As with most haunted houses, each room depicts a scene of horror, ranging from a spring-loaded corpse to a liver-crazed surgeon.

A silent guide maneuvers groups through the rooms by rhythmically pounding her death stick on the floor.

Along the way, unsuspecting visitors will be startled by a slew of ghouls sneaking around corners and seemingly appearing from the walls at some points.

Nightmare includes some dizzying effects that temporarily disorient most adventurers until the ghouls have a chance to pounce on their next victim.

The pouncing ghosts seemed to take special interest in the especially squeamish acts.

They could quickly distinguish the most frightened members of the group and harass them until they fled down the front steps of Nightmare.

Most often, however, the ghouls would tend to chase female adventurers, while neglecting to spook male adventures.

Though it lacks innovative or extraordinary special effects, adventurers looking for a standard haunted house won't be disappointed.

However, some survivors leaving Nightmare said not much has changed since last year; the only thing they found frightening was the price.



Playing DEAD

HAUNTED PREVIEW

Jamaica Haunted Forest Hayrack Ride

Where: 2601 Saltillo Rd.

When: Oct. 26-31 from dark-11 p.m. midnight on the 31st

Cost: \$5

★★★★ of 4 stars

HAUNTED PREVIEW

Nightmare on 16th Street

Where: 126 N. 16th

When: Everyday until Oct. 31, 7-11-30 p.m.

Cost: \$8

★★★★ of 4 stars



Jake Gillespie/DN

Plot twists tie 'Pay it Forward' acting in knots

BY SAMUEL MCKEOWN

"Pay It Forward," thanks to its performances, can be forgiven for quite a lot, until the end, which serves as a manipulative slap in the face to an audience that deserves better.

That final act of the director, Mimi Leder, is an accumulation of errors made from the very opening scene (the wrong one), through a subplot that does little more than divert from those three major performances.

They come from, in order of descending impressiveness, Kevin Spacey, Haley Joel Osment and Helen Hunt. Osment is the 11-year-old boy, Trevor, who devises the most eloquent answer to his teacher's - Mr. Simonet's (Spacey) - assignment for the year: Find one way to change the world and put it into action.

It's a pyramid scam, whose name mirrors the movie's title, which is to pay three "huge" favors to anybody, and they must pay three forward to someone else. Like most such scams, the thought of not paying it forward brings bad luck or, in this case, the onus of privately knowing you're a nasty citizen.

Favor No. 2 involves Trevor's boozy mom, Arlene (Hunt), and her lack of romance with men who aren't

equally drunk or up for a round of physical abuse. Trevor figures Mr. Simonet, a victim of severe burns on his face and body, is eloquent and wordy enough to clean her up.

Hunt's performance ranks below Spacey, who once again gets to embody easy intelligence. His performance borders in one scene, where his fragile order of life is threatened by the opportunity to love someone else.

The movie's not dumb enough to assume such goodness, whether in charity or romance, definitively shines through in constant, though the subplot that follows a reporter (Jay Mohr) toward the origins of the movement reveals a criminal saving the life of asthmatic girl.

How this subplot unfolds, however, interrupts the narrative structure of the rest of the movie, specifically the chemistry that Spacey and Hunt gurgled up.

The time frame gets mixed up a few times. Instead of longer, extended scenes with Arlene and Mr. Simonet, we're treated to Mohr threatening senators with sex scandals on golf courses. The sentimentalities oddly contrast.

It seems "Pay It Forward" is decidedly trying to make good on the Oscar buzz that preceded it with a balanced treatment that eschews the hokey, feel-

good aura that "Remember the Titans" oozes from its pores. It's admirable, but it only works when the three leads occupy the screen.

Osment continues to perform beyond his years; he holds his own in scenes with Spacey and out-acts Hunt. There are a few supporting roles that feel flat; Jay Mohr is merely adequate as the reporter, while Angie Dickinson hides in bum's clothes.

When the two narratives tie up at the end, there's satisfaction in the conclusion, and "Pay It Forward" only has one "Karate Kid"-like hurdle to clear. It takes a surprising veer in the opposite direction; the kind that, when you think about the action that has preceded it, makes no sense.

I kept wondering why certain people would be at a school on their day off or, even better, why Trevor arrived at the school on a bike when he just as easily could have been driven. It's these little hiccups that can be overlooked without that twist; they become glaring in the face of it.

It also changes the very nature of the film's message - a tone of promise turns to something else not easy to put a finger on. Sacrifice, I guess. "Pay It Forward" leaves so little time for this emotion to sink in that a final shot - which made me think of the final shot of "Field of Dreams" for some odd reason - does

not hit with the permanence I suppose it could have.

And yet the movie is valuable, and would be an Oscar contender in more adequate hands. Leder has dealt specifically in big budget disaster movies - "The Peacemaker" and "Deep Impact" - a genre that asks, pleads really, for so much to be going on at once that the frames simply drip with action. It shows, as Leder steps into some fine acting with unnecessary extra plot development.

"Pay It Forward" needed one more spit and polish to adequately prepare its final five minutes. As it is, the movie can't seem to get out of the way of the performances that make it worth seeing.

MOVIE REVIEW

Pay It Forward

Director: Mimi Leder

Stars: Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt, Haley Joel Osment

Rating: PG-13 (adult situations, language)

★★★★ of 4 stars