

'Unbreakable' strong movie for film lovers



Courtesy photo

Elijah (Samuel L. Jackson) and David Dunn (Bruce Willis) discuss the differences in their lives. Elijah is a frail man, who uses a cane to walk, while Dunn was the lone survivor of a train wreck and appears to be unbreakable.

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

"Unbreakable" is a movie wonder in one way, for sure — it convinces us it is about far more thematically than it reveals itself to be. Through the course of M. Night Shyamalan's follow-up to "The Sixth Sense," we're treated to an impressive and ominous buildup, a real pot-boiler. As the pompous "Exorcist" director William Friedkin once said: "A film by a person, not for people."

It's hard not to admire a director who chooses to play a game — his own game — on a level that hasn't been seen since Friedkin's days of heaven — the height of director auteurism in the 1970s. The opening scene of "Unbreakable" borders upon perfection: the conversation of two strangers filmed between the seats of a passenger train.

One of the strangers is David Dunn (Bruce Willis), a somber football stadium security guard weakly holding on to a failing marriage and a tenuous bond with his son (Spencer Treat Clark, not quite at the acting level of another three-named lad, Haley Joel Osment).

David has made sacrifices for what he's about to lose — sacrifices we later learn of in a painstakingly detailed flashback. And at the end of his failed flirtation with a female sports agent (Leslie Stefanson), he will, unbeknownst to anyone until the final moments of the movie, make another sacrifice. His mood is interrupted by a fantastic train crash, of which he is the only survivor. And David has survived without one scratch on his body.

There is the parallel story of a boy, born with broken bones in the back of a Philadelphia department store. He grows, becoming a target of surrounding schoolmates who taunt him for his brittle body by calling him Mr. Glass. He is saved only by a burgeoning love for comic books, a love he turns into a lucrative business as an art comics dealer.

Played by Samuel L. Jackson, Elijah has a wild frock of hair, a flowing trench coat for attire, a limp and a glass cane seemingly used for effect. He hears of David's survival and thinks he may have found his split-apart — a man on the opposite end of the spectrum, a man whose bones never break. In a sense, unbreakable. The setup is subtly demanding. Shyamalan is a dandy for detail — masterful at showing, not telling. Consider the scenes where David has left his wife (Robin Wright Penn) in her room as he sleeps with his son downstairs. Or why, for example, he was on the train to begin with.

Willis plays the character with an increasing amount of sadness and humility, which appears overly somber at first glance, but grows in implication as the story reveals itself. Like Elijah's wall of comics, "Unbreakable" becomes the story of one brittle man's insistence that another man is a superhero, incapable of receiving physical harm, coupled with the capacity of infinite strength.

Jackson is quietly menacing in this assertion. He produces exactly what the part asks of him, which reminds us that his skill goes beyond his formidable screen presence, and uses riddle-like dialogue to mask some agenda — what is it, exactly? — from David, all the while admonishing him to assume his true purpose in a life of fighting crime.

"Unbreakable," along its course, is more absorbing than "The Sixth Sense," as that movie required the ending to explain what had transpired before. Shyamalan's latest effort didn't require such an over-hanging twist, and yet he provides one, about two steps after David's first mission of good.

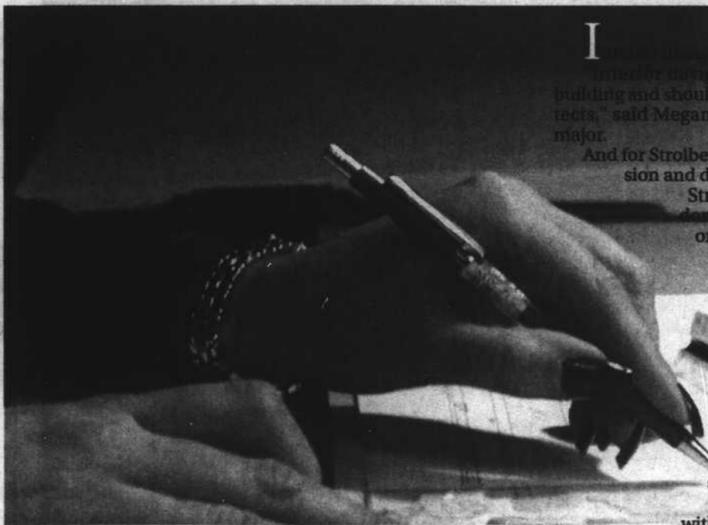
Like "The Sixth Sense," this twist was in the open from a particular line in the dialogue, so it is not a cheat of any kind, and it certainly fits with the preceding events. And yet, "Unbreakable" should not have ended with the event that it does. There's a few pages of the comic book missing, which, I suppose, could be termed the final confrontation. Instead, there's an abrupt rolling of end titles — the kind you expect at the end of a courtroom movie or something — that takes some of the enjoyment out of the closing twist.

Or maybe, in another likely possibility, Shyamalan's story is a massive misdirection, which requires multiple viewings to adequately discern. In reality, though, it's too hard to justify following one story line to a logical conclusion, then switching to another for effect. You're out of the theater before it sinks in. Maybe this is Shyamalan's point.

A critique of the conclusion is a quibble somewhere between major and minor. What is unmistakable is Shyamalan's arrival as a major, risk-taking filmmaker.

"Unbreakable" surpasses "The Sixth Sense" in tension, scope, visual enticement and purpose, as it should. This is no weak offering as a follow-up. The end doesn't erode the originality of the idea. It's the

DEDICATED TO DESIGN



Interior design is not decorating — it is much more. It is part of the entire design of a building and should be done hand-in-hand with architects," said Megan Strolberg, a junior interior design major.

And for Strolberg, interior design also involves passion and dedication.

Strolberg said she hates when people don't understand or respect what interior design is.

In brief, it's all about how space is used, she said.

Strolberg, who is from Axtell, is in the midst of learning how to use the space most efficiently.

"Interior design is designing a space for humans, so they can live and thrive in these spaces," she said.

Strolberg said she has been working artistically since high school.

Her parents have little experience with art and don't know where she gets her artistic ability, she said.

In her classes, she works night and day, using her artistic ability and understanding of interior design to create the perfect space for each project. She said she tries to make the space fit the person or people using it.

"In order to understand what I am going to design, I have to understand the person," she said, "and then to apply those characteristics ... to the characteristics of my project."

Making sure the details all fit together is commonly the hardest part of designing, Strolberg said.

But Katherine Ankerson, assistant professor of architecture and interior design, said one of Strolberg's strengths is paying attention to detail.

Ankerson said Strolberg has been working on a research project based on the extent and content of Web-based classes across the nation in interior design.

Strolberg immediately contacted an expert on Web classes, something not absolutely necessary for the project, Ankerson said. But because she did the extra work, her paper will be more thorough, Ankerson said.

"I think she works to perfection," Ankerson said. Perfection is what she aims for on every project, Strolberg said.

On a painting in an art class, Strolberg learned something in a critique she wished she had seen before turning the assignment in, she said.

Once she got the project back she spent the time to make her picture perfect because she did not want it to be anything less, Strolberg said.

"I like things perfect, but I'm not a perfectionist," she said.

Her mom, Cheryl Strolberg, said she thinks sometimes Megan Strolberg spends too much time working to make things perfect.

"We try to dissuade her from working so hard," Cheryl Strolberg said. "We try hard to get her to go out more and have a little more fun at times."

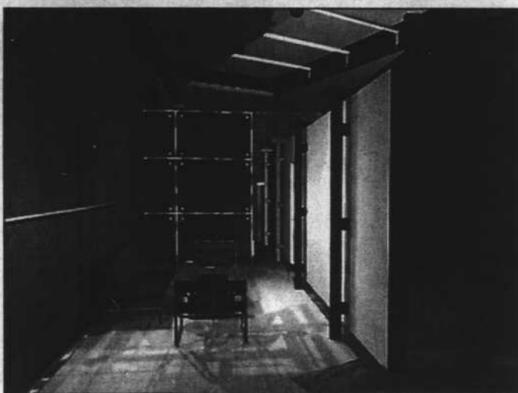
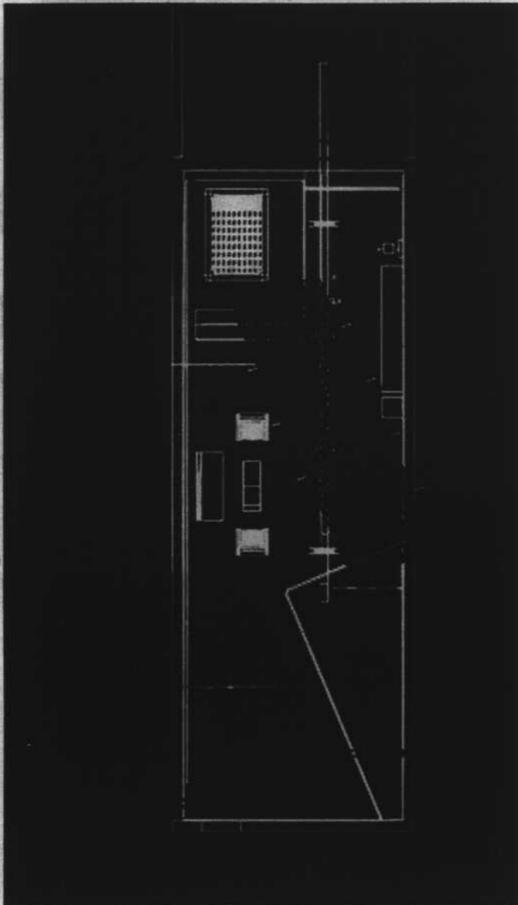
But Megan Strolberg is always telling her mom to trust her instincts to make the right decisions, Cheryl Strolberg said.

It is Cheryl Strolberg's dedication to her own job that has taught Megan Strolberg to put in the time to make things perfect.

"I respect my parents for their passion in their careers," Strolberg said. "That's what I want in my life. That's why I am willing to put in the long hours because I am passionate about what I do."



ABOVE: Megan Strolberg lays out the space and design of her projects using her laptop.



TOP LEFT: Interior design majors at the University of Nebraska — Lincoln use their computers 50 percent of the time and draw by hand the other 50 percent, Strolberg said.

MIDDLE LEFT: Strolberg designed her family room for her third year interior design studio class.

BOTTOM LEFT: Strolberg tries to make her designs fit the person and space they are designed for.

Story and Photos by David Clasen

Uninspired 'Red Planet' recycles boring sci-fi

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

MOVIE REVIEW

Red Planet

Director: Anthony Hoffman

Stars: Carrie Ann Moss, Val Kilmer

Rating: PG-13 (adult language, killer machine on the loose)

★ of 4 stars

There are moments when the absence of inspiration in Hollywood adequately matches the space taken up by the Great Lakes. Take "Red Planet," a movie that takes us to Mars to do not a whole helluva lot. How much, anyway, can be done by five astronauts landing on the planet, with nothing better to do than get off the planet?

Apparently, studio heads had the same question, which is why the movie got shelved in the summer season and moved to deep winter, so it could receive a quiet, proper burial without the death knell that the sci-fi turkey "Battlefield Earth" had to go through. "Red Planet" is not as bad a movie. It is, because one cannot logically make fun of it, more boring.

The story couldn't be more straightforward if it were O Street — Earth probes have sent algae to Mars to grow into a habitable planet. The algae disappears. The Mars probe containing a cross section of all white crew mem-

bers arrives to investigate. In an Ellen Ripley-kind of twist, the chief is a woman (Carrie Anne Moss), essentially a Trinity to Val Kilmer's space-janitor Neo.

There's a solar flare. A crash. A lack of oxygen. A strange machine named AMEE mistakenly switched into war mode and poised to kill the crew. A good number of scenes with Moss



Courtesy photo

Gallagher, a space janitor played by Val Kilmer, is confronted by an evil robot, AMEE. Gallagher is one member of a space crew sent to examine Mars.

alone, in the ship, hand to her head in distress. Many more scenes with Kilmer virtually watching the cheap dialogue tumble out of his thick greasy lips. A thrown-in romance. A few references to God. And, for good measure, some creepy crawly bugs that eat everything.

"Red Planet" spends a glut of time milking the former unmanned mis-

sions to Mars as useful ways to communicate/escape. Disaster movies, or science fiction movies for that matter, have moved beyond mere escape. They require some element of charm or humanity or, unfortunately, fervent violence.

It's no longer enough to hatch "The Poseidon Adventure" without Gene Hackman. And Kilmer is no Hackman.