

'Hannibal' differs from predecessor

■ The sequel to 'Silence of the Lambs' puts more focus on the title character.

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

"Hannibal" is a grand, gruesome stroke — a bloody, operatic sequel of a sequel, "Silence of the Lambs" — a peculiar, weird little film that swept the four major Academy Awards 10 years ago.

What worked in that film is conspicuously absent here. Gone are the tight, sweat-inducing basement encounters of FBI agent Clarice Starling, then played by Jodie Foster, and Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter played by Anthony Hopkins. Gone, too, is the grisly perversion of the serial killer hunt.

"Hannibal" is hardly a police procedural. Maybe that's why Starling, now played by Julianne Moore, spends the entire film in a basement alone, while Hopkins cavorts about Florence, Italy, sampling the finer things.

Director Ridley Scott, who takes over for "Silence" director Jonathan Demme, opens this movie up significantly, and, save the very ending, stays close to the spirit of the Thomas Harris novel. The film has been criticized for not being "Silence," which is about as fair as criticizing that film for not being the first in the series, "Manhunter," the 1986 Michael Mann movie. Those two, unlike "Hannibal," centered on investigations in which Lecter played an outside advisory participant, sinking his roots into the respective investigator.

"Hannibal" is a different film — by choice, not error — and is, in many ways, every bit as good as "Silence of the Lambs." Its middle hour, which largely concerns an Italian inspector's (Giancarlo Giannini) investigation of Lecter, is the strongest extended sequence of the entire trilogy.

Hopkins is bulkier and more looming than his Lecter of 10 years ago, but his performance again belongs on the top shelf of the industry. All things considered, including buckets of gore culminating with an almost needlessly gross ending, I liked "Hannibal" more than I expected. It's alive and thinking — as sophisticated and brooding as Lecter himself.

To build suspense, the title character stays under wraps for a good half hour, as the film first focuses on Moore's plain yet stylish Starling character, who leads an ill-fated raid on a drug lord's wife. The raid, and subsequent investigation, is handled rather clumsily, as Justice Department creep Paul Krendler (Ray Liotta) offers Starling redemption through re-opening the Lecter case.

Krendler works in collusion with one of Lecter's former victims, a pedophile by the name of Mason Verger who cut off his own face and fed it to his dogs at Lecter's request. Played by a skilled and unrecognizable unbilled actor under a mask of jellied skin and one gruesome-looking eye, Mason sounds like a creepy James Stewart with a lisp. It's a rather juicy role and an equally impressive performance.

Mason offers \$3 million for the return of Lecter, and the Italian inspector Pazzi (Giannini) bites, hunting down the doctor with his haggard look and sad demeanor. His motivation is obvious enough — a beautiful wife who needs better seats at the opera — and his legacy of family ignominy drives him further. Lecter picks up the scent, and the chase is on.

Scott is at his best in Florence, with a few set pieces of the city that are hard to compare to. One, set in an outdoor opera, is reminiscent of the type of grand ambition that embraced "The Godfather" trilogy. Had the movie stayed in Europe, and grounded itself in that story alone, "Hannibal" would have been able to surpass its predecessor.

Yet the connection to Starling is strong, and an encounter with Pazzi, along with supplemental information that proves that Mason is after him, leads Lecter back to the States for a meeting with all the usual delights. This leads to a breathless scene inside a mall with a merry-go-round and an eventual meeting between Mason and Lecter.

The screenplay, written by heavyweights David Mamet and Steven Zaillian (more Zaillian than Mamet) follows Harris' novel closely, and for good reason, as the plot itself is intriguing, moving and appropriately grotesque. It loses some of the exposition on Starling's character, which is unfortunate because Moore is left with little to do. She comes off as rather unlikable.

The book's ending, which has Lecter and Starling fall in love, has been lopped off for one that suggests a sequel that will likely never come.

But the gory scene inside Krendler's summer house has not been omitted and leaves viewers with a sort of stunned, glazed-over look when they leave the theater. Whether or not this scene, among the most gruesome things I've ever seen, overshadowed the film's finer points, I don't know. It didn't for me. But it's unclear why it has been included or why it was in the book. Simply to say it was done, I suppose.

Either way, it draws to a close an intriguing film so unlike its leaner older brother, it bears worth considering on its own merits. This film, like the book, is no retreat. But "Hannibal" the movie is more appealing than the book, as Scott is able to broaden his lens to the grandeur of the Lecter character. A fantastic world is what Lecter needs to hold him. That's what he's been given here. Hence, the movie's title: for him, by him, of him. It works.

"Hannibal" Starring Anthony Hopkins, Julianne Moore, Ray Liotta and Gary Oldman. Directed by Ridley Scott. Rated R (for supreme violence and gore) Playing at the Douglas 3.



Jerry Morgan/DN

Film smashes box office marks despite poor reviews, final gruesome scene

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Hannibal Lecter made mincemeat of the competition — and the record book.

The grisly "Hannibal," sequel to "The Silence of the Lambs," debuted with a colossal \$58 million in its first three days. It grossed more than the next 15 movies combined, according to industry estimates Sunday, and easily beat the \$34.7 million record for a February opening set by "Scream 3" last year.

Only two other movies, "The Lost World: Jurassic Park" and "Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace," grossed more in their first three-day weekends. "Hannibal" also had the best opening ever for an R-rated movie, topping the \$42.3 million debut of "Scary Movie" last summer.

"Hannibal" was "the most widely anticipated follow-up since 'Phantom Menace,' and it's the return of one of the greatest cinematic characters of all time," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc., which tracks the box office. "It proved to be an irresistible combination to moviegoers."

"The Wedding Planner," No. 1 for the previous two weekends, slipped

to second place with \$7.8 million.

The weekend's only other big premiere was the comedy "Saving Silverman," which opened in third place with \$7.4 million.

The martial arts epic "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" took in \$5.1 million and topped \$60 million over the weekend to pass "Life Is Beautiful" as the domestic box-office champ among foreign-language films.

The overall box office rose again, with the top 12 movies grossing \$107.6 million, up 43 percent compared with the same weekend in 2000. The box office has increased every weekend this year.

Playing in 3,230 theaters, "Hannibal" averaged a stellar \$17,957 per cinema, compared with a \$3,000 average in 2,467 theaters for "Saving Silverman."

Based on the best-selling sequel by Thomas Harris, "Hannibal" follows Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) a decade after "Silence of the Lambs" as one of his old victims plots revenge against the serial killer.

"Hannibal" just devoured everybody," said Larry Gleason, president of worldwide distribution for MGM.

Since "Silence of the Lambs," Lecter has become a pop-culture

icon, an almost universally recognized bogeyman.

"It's like Batman or Superman," Gleason said. "You don't have to say much more than 'Hannibal.' It's truly become part of the worldwide vocabulary."

MGM, which co-produced "Hannibal" with Universal, sorely needed a success. Struggling to overcome more than a decade of financial troubles and shifts in ownership and management, MGM's last hit was in 1999 with the James Bond flick "The World Is Not Enough."

Audiences did not seem to care that Hopkins was the only principal to return from "Silence of the Lambs." Julianne Moore subbed for Jodie Foster as FBI agent Clarice Starling, while Ridley Scott ("Gladiator") succeeded Jonathan Demme as director.

Moviegoers also were not swayed by "Hannibal's" mixed reviews. Many critics said it was weak compared to its predecessor. Some critics were nauseated by a gruesome banquet scene at the end of "Hannibal."

But that scene simply whetted audience appetites, Dergarabedian said.

"The pre-release buzz about the gore in the final scene, that just added to the mystique," he said.

Music men fill streets

■ Two musicians have become a part of downtown culture with weekend performances.

BY SEAN MCCARTHY

As freezing rain and heavy snow pelted downtown Thursday, people hopped over snow banks, ran with their hoods shielding their heads and slipped to their favorite watering holes. Two musicians continued playing a musical set on the corner of 14th and O streets, just as they do most weekends. For some street musicians, the code for playing on nights like these is the same as the mail.

The two musicians, Charles LeMans Barnes and Rupert Gutierrez, have been a staple of the downtown scene for the past few months. Barnes' stage name is LeMans. And while LeMans has played to crowded houses in Maine, Wisconsin, California and Minnesota, his most current stage has been the epicenter of college activity on weekend nights.

LeMans is a towering presence. Standing about 6-foot-4 in his trench coat, brightly colored tennis shoes and thick, dark-blond dreadlocks, LeMans looks like he could easily join the Parliament Funkadelic entourage.

LeMans has lived in Lincoln off and on for the past two years. Around 9 p.m., he and Gutierrez will set up their equipment, which includes a Harmony guitar, a Casio keyboard, an amplifier that can also play tapes and a black case to display some of LeMans' recorded works as well as a spot for tips.

"I do a lot of Otis Redding-style soul, but I do a lot of original stuff, too," LeMans said.

LeMans has played music since the second grade. Proficient in bass, keyboard and piano, he played with various bands before moving to Hollywood in 1989. While in Hollywood, LeMans said he rubbed elbows with some well-known musical figures.

"I shared a locker with Christopher Cross once," he said.

Gutierrez said he occasionally played with LeMans when they played with a band called the Nightwalkers, out of LaMiranda, Cal. Gutierrez plays electric guitar.

LeMans said the public response has been good whenever the two have played. LeMans said he has made up to \$200 in tips in one night. LeMans said the money he made primarily goes to motel fare.

"I'll be dedicating stuff by Otis Redding, Michael Bolton and even myself on some nights," he said.

The occasional encounter with an intoxicated person is inevitable on the corner of 14th and O streets. LeMans said he has dealt with a couple of belligerent hecklers.

"Sometimes they'll run over our stuff, but for the most part, the people have been pretty nice," he said.

George Kholousi, night manager at the Gourmet Grill, 1400 O St., said the two musicians attract little business to the restaurant. He has watched people come up and talk to the two musicians and ask for a dedication.

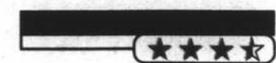
"(LeMans) is pretty consistent," Kholousi said. "That's what I like about him."

'Silverman' brings humor to friend vs. girlfriend dilemma

■ Jason Biggs stars in the movie about the two relationships that is full of side-splitting laughs.

BY SARAH SUMNER

The girlfriend vs. the best friends is a battle we all know, and it usually isn't very pretty. "Saving Silverman" contains all the crotch kicks, food fights and insane insults



that result from choosing a lover over life-long friendships. It's ugly, crude and utterly hilarious.

Darren (Jason Biggs) and his childhood friends, J.D. (Jack Black) and Wayne (Steve Zahn), live a meager existence. The guiding light in their lives is the music of Neil Diamond (they have a cover band). Needless to say, they are very lonely men, and when the moment arises for Darren to get the girl, he goes for it.

After he and Judith (Amanda Peet) go from zero to 60 with their relationship, he finds out that she can't stand his friends and forbids him from seeing them. Thus, J.D. and Wayne kidnap Judith and make it appear that she is dead so they can set Darren and his high school crush up. Ahh, let the comedy ensue.

Biggs, best known for his affec-

tionate apple pie scene in "American Pie," is more the heart-felt romantic than the butt of the joke. He is escaping the dumb-ass persona and is entering into the caring, sweet, want-to-love-me type, and he looks quite promising.

Peet is an up and comer from the TV series "Jack & Jill" and has a few movie credits to her name. She plays a very forceful and demanding woman. She fights, curses and yells to get her way. She is either goofy or the sex-bomb in most of her roles, but being the royal wench is a role she plays well, and she adds her comedic sense to spice it up.

Black, who starred in "High Fidelity," and Zahn, from "That Thing You Do" and "Happy Texas," are the bumbling idiots who think

they can outwit Judith and get away with the crime. They work so well together and play off of each other's quick wit and timing to pump the movie full of quirks and crazy humor.

The movie is full of off-the-wall antics and funny one-liners that catch the audience off guard and explode them into laughter. Black and Zahn, with the humor of Peet, make "Saving Silverman" a side-aching, eye-tearing pearl of a comedy.

"Saving Silverman." Starring Jason Biggs, Amanda Peet, Jack Black and Steve Zahn. Directed by Dennis Dugan. Rated PG-13 (adult language and adult content). Showing at the Plaza 4 and SouthPointe.