

COVERAGE

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LOGLINE: A young female FBI trainee visits a maximum-security asylum to interview a brilliant cannibalistic psychiatrist to aid in her first assignment -- capturing a serial killer on the loose.

COMMENT SUMMARY: "The Silence of the Lamb" plot is dark, with great suspense, tension, twists and turns. The suspense is further enhanced as a young female FBI trainee, on the hunt to capture a serial killer, enters a maximum-security asylum to solicit the help of a cannibalistic psychiatrist, Hannibal Lecter. From the first mention of the brilliant doctor's name we get the sense he is beyond evil. Each scene lends terror to his powerful persona. "The Silence of the Lambs" has all of the elements of great storytelling that will thrill a movie audience.

EXCELLENT GOOD AVERAGE BELOW AVE. POOR

PLOT:				X
(STRUCTURE)				
CHARACTERS:		X		
PREMISE:		X		
DIALOGUE:		X		
TONE:		X		

Recommendation: RECOMMEND

SYNOPSIS

An FBI Training Academy in Quantico, Virginia has an outstanding, top in the class student, CLARICE STARLING, (20's). She is summoned to the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit office of Special Agent JACK CRAWFORD (46). Agent Crawford, impressed with Clarice's academic prowess offers her an opportunity to interview the notorious, uncooperative, cannibalistic, brilliant psychiatrist, DOCTOR HANNIBAL LECTER. Learning that the assignment could possibly lead to the capture of another notorious serial killer, BUFFALO BILL, who skins his victims, Clarice agrees to the questionnaire interview. She is met in Baltimore at the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane by the department head, DR. FREDERICK CHILTON. He leads her to the thick Plexiglas cell of Hannibal Lecter. Upon seeing Clarice, Dr. Lecter, who is a sophisticated, cultured man, treats her courteously until Clarice tries to get him to answer the questionnaire. He grows impatient and dismisses her. As she walks down the corridor to leave, another patient throws his semen in her face. Enraged, Lecter calls her back and offers her an olive branch. He tells her a riddle. If she solves it, she will find the severed head of one of his patients, BENJAMIN RASPAIL (MISS MOFET), in a rent-a-storage lot. After the finding Clarice returns to talk to Lecter. He links Raspail to Buffalo Bill and offers to help Clarice profile Buffalo Bill if Clarice gets him transferred to a facility with a window so he can have a view of trees and away from the opportunist, Dr. Chilton.

In the meantime, Buffalo Bill abducts the daughter, CATHERINE MARTIN (21) of a United States Senator, RUTH MARTIN. Agent Crawford immediately puts Clarice on a plane to West Virginia, where a victim of Buffalo Bill is found. Clarice helps perform the autopsy and discovers a chrysalis of an Asian bug, Death's-head Moth, from the victim's throat. At the funeral home, Clarice hears the singing of "Shall We Gather at the River." It triggers memories of her traumatized childhood. Her father, a police officer, is mortally wounded in a failed robbery. Ten year-old Clarice is sent to live with her uncle on a sheep farm.

Crawford tells Clarice the senator will honor Lecter's request if Lecter gives them the information they need to profile Buffalo Bill. It's a lie. Unaware of the deceit, Clarice relays the proposal of the transfer to Lecter. Lecter tells Clarice he will help her profile Buffalo Bill on a quid pro quo basis. That is, he will offer Clarice clues about Buffalo Bill in exchange of information about her worst childhood memories. Dr. Chilton tapes the conversation between Lecter and Clarice. Later, he reveals to Lecter that Clarice lied to him. Chilton makes a deal of his own to Lecter, agreeing to transfer him to Tennessee, in exchange for information about Buffalo Bill. Lecter agrees. He tells Chilton that Buffalo Bill's name is Louis, and he will give the senator Buffalo Bills last name after he is transferred to Tennessee.

In Tennessee, at the Memphis Nation Guard hanger, Senator Martin meets with Lecter. He tells the senator that Buffalo Bill's name is Louis Friend. When the senator presses him for Buffalo Bill's address and other identifying information, Lecter becomes rude. The senator storms off.

A manhunt for Catherine Martin begins. While Chilton is thrilled with all of the news media attention and being in the limelight, Clarice gains entrance through the tight security of the Memphis Shelby County Courthouse. She visits Lecter. He is inside a steel cage. Clarice hands Lecter the drawings he left behind at the Baltimore prison. She confronts him about the false

information he gave the senator about Buffalo Bill. She then pleads with him to tell her how she could find the serial killer. Lecter tells her all the answers are in the file. Then, he demands she continue telling him about her childhood. Clarice recounts the horror of discovering the slaughtering of lambs at her uncle's farm and her futile attempt to save at least one. While telling her story, Dr. Chilton appears. When he sees Clarice, he is enraged. Chilton has the security guards remove Clarice. But before she is taken away, Lecter hands her Buffalo Bill's case file. Their fingers touch. Dr. Chilton puts Clarice on a plane back to Virginia.

During Lecter's dinnertime, the security team lets down their guard. Lecter gets the better of them and escapes from his cell. The police storm the floor. They find one guard barely alive. Paramedics are called as SWAT searches the building for Lecter. The SWAT team discovers a body in the elevator shaft. When the hatch is opened, it is the body of one of the guards. The paramedics load the gurney with the surviving guard into the ambulance. A sheet covers his face. As the ambulance speeds down the street a paramedic checks the patient's pulse. The vitals are normal. Lecter pulls off the sheet and kills the paramedic. He commandeers the ambulance and escapes to the airport.

Clarice analyzes Lecter's notes and realizes the first victim, FREDERICA BIMMEL, knew Bill before he killed her. She was a tailor. Clarice visits Bimmel's parlor and discovers Buffalo Bill is also a tailor. She telephones Crawford. Crawford tells her he has received information from Johns Hopkins Hospital and he now knows the serial killers name. It is James Gumb, aka, John Grant from Calumet City, Illinois. Crawford leads the SWAT team to that address to arrest him. Clarice interviews Bimmel friend, STACY, who tells her about an elderly woman, MRS. LIPPMAN, who Bimmel did alteration work for. Clarice makes a visit to the house where Mrs. Lippman lived. Soon, she realizes it is the house of James Gumb. She draws her weapon. Gumb flips off the lights in his house and disappears in the dark to escape. Clarice pursues him and discovers a hysterical Catherine Martin in a well in the basement. Gumb, wearing night vision goggles, sees Clarice. He has a gun, cocks the trigger to shoot her. Clarice hears the click of the revolver. She spins around, shoots into the darkness, killing Gumb.

It is graduation day at the FBI academy. Clarice gets a surprise telephone call. It is Hannibal Lecter. He assures Clarice he has no plans to pursue her and ask her for the same courtesy. Just before he hangs up, he tells Clarice he's "having an old friend for dinner."

COMMENTS

“The Silence of the Lambs” arguably will be a classic for years to come. The premise of a young female FBI agent in-training sent to a maximum-security asylum to interview a notorious, uncooperative, cannibalistic, psychotic murderer to aid her in the hunt to find another serial killer is brilliant. The underlying theme, characters, dialogue and conflict engages the audience to a satisfying end.

The plot is centered on the protagonist Clarice Starling with a goal of tracking down a serial killer with the help of an institutionalized psychotic murderer. Most scenes are dense with twists, turns, suspense, and conflict that move the story forward at a good pace. However, there are a few scenes that are problematic, such as the final showdown Clarice has with Buffalo Bill where she shoots him dead in the dark. It is confusing and unbelievable. Another unbelievable scene is when Lecter outsmarts the SWAT team by lying in a gurney and being wheeled to the ambulance by the EMT. He kills the EMT’s and escapes to the airport.

The characters are relatable and clearly defined. Clarice Starling is an intelligent, brave, discerning twenty-year old in-training FBI rookie. She has a strong internal conflict that haunts her; the memories of the slaughtering of Lambs at her relatives farm. Her arc develops gradually and results in a satisfying maturity at the end. Doctor Hannibal Lecter is the most fascinating of all the characters. He is diabolically evil with a penchant of eating his victims; yet, he can be pleasant and courteous like when he meets Clarice for the first time. Buffalo Bill is a serial killer who murders overweight woman for their skin so he could use it to make a body suit for himself. He has no redeeming qualities. The supporting characters are well-developed and each has their own goals and purposes.

The dialogue is brilliant and the subtext is memorable such as when Lecter states, “I’m having an old friend for dinner.” Clarice’s confrontational dialogue with Crawford, Chilton, and Lecter reveals her personality, moves the plot forward and remains consistent throughout. Each supporting character has differing voices and their dialogue flows smoothly and adequately defines them.

The tone of “The Silence of the Lambs” is delightfully thrilling. Each scene, detail, and facts vividly appeals to the senses, such as when Lecter forces Clarice to face her childhood memories. “The Silence of the Lambs” conveys a dramatic climate as we witness Lecter’s call to Clarice to wish her well. It leaves the audience breathless.

Overall, “The Silence of the Lambs” is a remarkably engaging film. The characters have strong internal as well as external conflicts that will drive the plot forward and provide a satisfy audience experience.