

'Silent Hill' starts off with promise, but fails

In theaters

SILENT HILL, directed by Christophe Gans, written by Roger Avary, 125 minutes, rated R.

The latest movie inspired by a popular video game is Christophe Gans' "Silent Hill," which turns out to be the literary equivalent of JavaScript fueled by a Pentium-II chip.

Screenwriter Roger Avary had the unhappy task of adapting the computer code into words, though his unusually chatty movie unfortunately doesn't take a cue from the title or even from the movie's poster, which features a young girl staring intently at us from the gloom. She has no mouth. For some, she either will be the embodiment of Speak No Evil or the perfect child. For others, perhaps a bit of both.

The film stars Radha Mitchell as Rose, Sean Bean as her husband, Chris, and Jodelle Ferland as their adopted daughter Sharon, who as the movie begins has sleepwalked to the edge of a cliff, from which she has every intention of jumping.

Since there wouldn't be much of a movie if she did, Rose naturally sandbags her just in time to hear her whisper the words, "Silent Hill," which apparently is enough to set the gears of the plot in motion.

Rose becomes consumed with the idea of finding out what Silent Hill is and why Sharon suddenly is scribbling in ways that children tend to scribble in horror movies when something isn't quite right with their

wiring. Her drawings depict people burning alive in a satanic hellfire — not exactly the pleasant pictures a parent favors for showcasing on the family refrigerator and a far cry from the happy colors that once brightened Sharon's palette.

Initially, what unfolds is creepy and atmospheric, with Rose taking off with Sharon to Silent Hill, W.Va., while Chris frets at home before deciding to go after them. It's a good thing he does, because when Rose and Sharon do reach Silent Hill after a brisk run-in with a lady cop (Laurie Holden, replete in skin-tight black leather), what they find is a ghost town that quickly absorbs all of them, including the cop, into what can best be described as a parallel universe.

Inside, a former coal mining town is burning beneath the surface. The air is smoky; embers fall from the sky. When Sharon goes missing after a car wreck, Rose goes in search of her, which leads her deep into a town filled with its share of secrets, curses and monsters — the inhuman and human sort.

"Silent Hill" gets the monsters and the sets right; they are imaginative and well-drawn in ways that the plot simply isn't. After a promising first hour, in which it appears that the movie will shrewdly eschew gore for mood and chills, the film slides into a muddy, clumsy affair in which the many subplots tear away at the center, shredding any trace of sense along the way.

At two hours, the film is too long by a third, but that's because it must attempt to mend all of the loose threads it leaves in its wake. It doesn't do so — it would take a skilled programmer to figure out this code — and neither Gans nor Avary prove up to the task.

Grade: C-



CHRISTOPHER SMITH
REEL REVIEWS

Concrete firm's Web site links to town maps

On the Web site of the Maine Old Cemetery Association, there is a most interesting link — to American Concrete Industries of Auburn and Bangor.

Perhaps you can guess why the link is there. As a manufacturer of cemetery vaults, among other items, the company has on its own site maps that show the locations of some cemeteries in a number of towns.

I checked Guilford, and sure enough, the site properly locates Elmwood Cemetery on one side of Route 15, and Lawn Cemetery on the other. The Guilford Center Cemetery is not listed, but of course that's the oldest cemetery in town.

In Hampden, the map for Lakeview Cemetery, which I guess I've always thought of as the West Hampden cemetery, is located on the north side of Route 9, also called Western Avenue.

Lots of towns don't have map links, but several do.

To find the MOCA site, enter

www.rootsweb.com/~memo ca/moca.htm, and click on the link to American Concrete Industries.

Make note of MOCA's spring meeting, to begin with registration 8:30-9:15 a.m. Saturday, May 20, hosted by the Freeport Historical Society at Freeport Community Library, 10 Library Drive. The program will include presentations on "Historical Freeport" by the Freeport Historical Society, and on "Sociology of Cemeteries" by researcher Helen A. Shaw.

Bring a bag lunch for noon-time. At 1 p.m., join Randall Wade Thomas for cemetery tours. Also, find out about "a modern day treasure hunt that could reinvigorate your group and interest others." Doesn't that sound intriguing?

Emily Quint is president of MOCA. If you plan to attend, please let her know by May 13 by e-mail, quint@tdstelme.com, or call her at 635-2231.

MOCA meetings draw a good attendance, and are just the place where you might find someone who has an idea where you might find that long-lost ancestor.

Here's another nifty event.



ROXANNE MOORE SAUTIER
FAMILY TIES

Happy 102nd birthday to Bessie Brannen Stockford, who spent most of the first nine decades of her life in her hometown of Oakfield.

She was the daughter of Willard and Laura (Laskey) Brannen, and had three children, eight grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren and 15 great-great-grandchildren, with another due this month.

In 1994, she moved to Connecticut to live with her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dutton Jr. If you'd like to contact Bessie Stockford, write her at 202 Colony St., Stratford, CT 06615.

3361. PETERSON. Looking for relatives of the Peterson family who were descendants of Christian and Caroline Peterson who lived in Westbrook. Their children were: Charles, born in 1886; Julia, 1891; Jennie, 1895; Agnes, 1895; Lillian, 1897; Walter, 1900; and Edwina, 1906. Mildred Bennett, 519 New Duntown Road, Wade, ME 04786, or mbennett@mf.net.

Send genealogy queries to Family Ties, Bangor Daily News, P.O. Box 1329, Bangor, ME 04402; or send e-mail, familyti@bangor dailynews.net.

It's the end of the innocence: 'Guilt' is now a verb

Pat Rickman of Latham, N.Y., writes: "Is the use of 'guilt' as a verb becoming common? I hear people say things like 'My mother guilted me because I broke her favorite necklace.' A novel I'm reading contains the same type of usage."



BARBARA WALLRAFF
WORD COURT

Dear Pat: Yes, the verb "guilt" has become increasingly common during the past five years or so. Here's a typical example, from a summary of recent episodes of the soap opera "Guiding Light": "Dinah guilted Harley into staying home to take care of a pain-ridden Gus so Dinah could deliver the speech at the Policemen's Ball." The verb is so new that most dictionaries haven't taken note of it yet. Of the major American dictionaries, just one — the New Oxford American, Second Edition — includes "guilt" as a verb, and labels it "informal." It's defined as "make (someone) feel guilty, especially in order to induce them to do something."

As the "especially ..." part of that suggests, the verb "guilt" is usually used a bit differently from the way you used it in your example sentence. It is ordinarily followed by "into" and a description of what the person has been induced to do — as in "After I broke her favorite necklace, my mother guilted me into buying her a new one."

Do I like this verb? In serious contexts, no. For instance, "Demonstrations by immigrants have so far failed to guilt Congress into legalizing ..." would be ridiculous. But I have nothing against the verb "guilt" in friendly conversation — or in plot summaries of soap operas.

Could we look at that dictionary definition again, though? Good grief — it has the plural pronoun "them" referring to the singular word "someone"! And that didn't happen by mistake. The same dictionary's entry for the word "them" refers the reader to "they," where a usage note says, in part, that "they" (and by extension "them") "is now generally accepted in contexts where it follows an indefinite pronoun such as 'anyone,' 'no one,' 'someone,' or 'a person.' ... 'They' is used in this dictionary in many cases where 'he' would have been used formerly."

This time the New Oxford

American is not alone. All the major American dictionaries say "they" can be singular — though a note in the American Heritage Dictionary warns readers that many people dislike this usage. I'm one of them — that's why I brought this up. I don't believe the singular "they" is any more appropriate for serious contexts than "guilt into" is, and I hope I can guilt everyone into sticking with good old "the person" or "he or she."

Dane Karvois of Manchester, N.H., writes: "I was recently asked to look through a database to determine whether it contained any information on a particular topic. I was requested to forward any information I

obtained, and also told 'Negative information need not be reported.' If I can't find any reference to the topic in the database, do I have to write back to the person who made the request? Is 'negative information' the same as the absence of information?"

Dear Dane: I admit the phrase confused me, too, when I read your letter. But "negative information" is bad news; "positive information" is good news.

If you really didn't know this, it might be considered negative information about you at work — so let's keep it quiet.

Barbara Wallraff is the author of three books about language, including "Word Court" and the new "Word Fugitives," and is a words columnist at The Atlantic Monthly. Send your language disputes and questions to Word Court, Box 67375, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, or visit www.word court.com.

Land

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Partly, it's the sheer beauty of their world. Lunden talks about the early morning, when "the sun would be coming up, the birds would be singing, and it would be so peaceful to get on a tractor and look around as I was preparing the ground." For 90-year-old Sylvia Holbrook, a dairy farmer in New Vineyard since 1932, it's the autumn view of miles of ridges from her back field: "You can just see for miles and miles everywhere, and it's beautiful. Oh, in the fall when the leaves turn, ah, you wouldn't believe it. I just ... look and look."

But there's something else pulling these women into their rural lives, and that might be best characterized by Weir of Cumberland, who was an early member of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association: "If you go out and raise your own food and bring it in and cook for yourself ... you don't worry about self-esteem. You've got it."

Shaw interviewed 30 women for this project, and ultimately featured 10, covering a diversity of Maine rural life. Two, Deb Soule of Avena Botanicals in Rockport and Gail Edwards of Blessed Maine Herbs in Athens, are herbalists. Rikki Boehmer forages around her Monhegan Island home. Carol Varin and her husband came to Maine from Rhode Island, bought a plot of rocky land and started farming on Beddington Ridge because, she says, "we were too young and idealistic to know that you can't live off the land." Guide Leitha Kelly of Allagash continues the work of generations of foresters before her. Mary Philbrook of Presque Isle speaks of an ancient connection to the land as the first woman Micmac tribal chief. Jenny Cirone, who has since died, was the daughter of an island lighthouse keeper who lobstered out of South Addison and pastured sheep on nearby islands.

Though not herself a Maine woman living off the land, but rather a photographer teaching at Emerson College in Boston, Shaw has summered in the Belgrade Lakes region for 26 years. Part of her compulsion to undertake this 10-year project has been her longing to understand what keeps her coming back to Maine year after year.

Take this project slowly. While exquisitely designed by Yellow House Studios of Rockport, with portraits of the women juxtaposed against



Lauren Shaw

contour maps of their land, the book portion is more a catalog of the photography show than the heart of the project. Despite the excellent essay by critic Lucy Lippard, I found myself looking through the book and wanting more — more pictures of the women and their land; and most definitely more of their stories. I wanted to know whether they saw living on the land as a choice, what their delights were, what were their discouragements. Then I played the DVD that slips neatly into the back of the book. Here is the heart of the project. Beautifully edited, filled with wisdom, courage and a sense of reality, it is so indescribably rich that I found myself feeling as connected and transformed as if I'd just taken a long hike through the woods to a favorite blueberry field, returning home with a pint of sweet berries for my family's breakfast.

Living off the land is not romantic, as Lippard notes in her essay. It means being held sway by forces of weather and economy one cannot control. And though only two generations ago it was a common way of life in Maine, now it is not the norm. This project offers a sense of what we lose when we treat land as commodity, forgetting that our connection to place is a relationship as difficult and as fulfilling as any in our lives.

In late May, "Maine Women: Living on the Land" travels to Augusta, where it will be on view at the State Capitol June 1-Aug. 25. October 1-27, the show will be featured at College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor. Published by the Farnsworth Art Museum, the 64-page book and DVD are packaged together. They cost \$40 and can be purchased from the author or the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland. To buy the book and DVD, visit www.laurenshaw.com, e-mail LRShaw1@aol.com, or contact the Farnsworth museum, 16 Museum St., Rockland. 596-6457.

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