

# Mothman Prophecies Worth Watching

by [Stine Fletcher](#)



*The Mothman Prophecies*, Dir. Mark Pellington. 2002.

A friend and I have been seeing a movie each month since Harry Potter played in Starkville, Mississippi's fancy new cinema last November. The theater has stadium style seating, a great sound system, and huge screens (and really nice, new, clean restrooms). We're now kinda spoiled. He picked *Lord of the Rings* around New Year's, so now it was my turn to choose. I was hooked on the possibilities promised by *The Mothman Prophecies*, thanks to the film's trailer. Still, I had my doubts about Richard Gere's ability to come through as a believable character in a supernatural thriller/horror story. Nonetheless, I was certain there was something about this movie that made it special: call it an intuition or call it the influence of a winged supernatural force.

Pellington's film opens with camera work that initially seems confusing, yet is quite interesting in its conception and execution. Lights are elongated and reflected where they should not appear. Distortions and flickers flit across the eye. Such effects serve to create viewer tension from the outset, as he/she is immediately drawn into the story simply by trying to figure out what the camera is up to. After a time, the real reason for such visual oddities becomes clear—just as parts of a music score have been used to create tension and lead up to a frightening moment in a film, so the camera work in *Mothman* prepares the viewer for the intrusion of the supernatural. This intriguing camera work is consistent throughout the movie until its final scenes, when the influence of the supernatural begins to wane. Needless to say, this makes the movie well worth viewing on the big screen.

Visuals aside, it is the acting that makes *Mothman* work. Gere's character portrayals in previous films initially make him seem a poor choice for a horror flick. Viewers are likely to ask themselves, how can the journalist of *Runaway Bride* be suitable for haunting by the Mothman and his ilk? Surprisingly enough, Gere proves he is up to the challenge. His characterization of a journalist who is drawn into the world of the occult appears more subtle than those of his past films. He seems to have traded his cockiness for some vulnerability, as he is even willing to sport his natural graying hair for this role. In essence, Gere has managed to subdue his previous characters' typically unbounded egos, thus leaving him open to the strange and terrible workings of that dark being with wings.

Subtlety seems to be the theme of *Mothman*, for its musical score is one that depends on softness and nuance. Unlike the loud crashing pop song scores of horror movies obviously aimed at teens, this music blends well with the atmosphere of the story, without overwhelming the audience. Its occasional ethereal synthesizer pieces enhance the eerie milieu set up by the camera. In fact, *Mothman's* soundtrack is one that viewers, especially fans of Goth bands, may find worth owning on CD.

This is not to say that *The Mothman Prophecies* is Oscar material. *Mothman* does have some stock elements: the haunted main character, the necessary love interest, the levelheaded sidekick, the expert on the paranormal.... But then again, one is hard pressed to remember the last time ANY viewer was treated to a completely original horror movie plot in the last few decades. In fact, many movie critics have adopted the catchy description of *Mothman* as being a film where *The X Files* meets *The Blair Witch Project*. I personally argue that this is highly inaccurate, especially the comparison of *Mothman* to *Blair Witch*. *The Blair Witch Project* exploded into the movie pop culture scene and has become a popular and ready reference for uninformed comparisons of horror movies by various critics whose knowledge of the horror genre on the big screen was previously limited to box office hits. *Mothman* bears no resemblance whatsoever to the fictional events of Berkettsville, Maryland, and *Mothman* is of a much better caliber of movie than the anemic *Blair Witch* or its *Book of Shadows* sequel.

Although *The Mothman Prophecies* draws its basic storyline from unexplained sightings reported in Point Pleasant, West Virginia from November 1966 thru 1967, and from the very real events involving Silver Bridge in December 1967, Pellington's movie has more in common with some of the stock plot elements of the older horror movies that didn't make anyone filthy rich from ticket sales. It resurrects such imagery as the ghost of the tragic victim (sometimes a pale waif of a child) or other entity that appears before disaster strikes, and such thematic concerns as the misinterpretation of prophesy about future catastrophes. It plays on the stock idea of the character who descends into madness as the result of such prophetic knowledge. Pellington blends these various elements with an interesting story and great camera work to create a good horror movie. My friend himself noted that if I was always this good at picking out movies, he might leave the choosing to me for the future.

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NOTE: Several web sites describe the unexplained Mothman sightings in Point Pleasant, some of which refer to books on the subject. The event at Silver Bridge, which comprises the climax of the movie, is a well-documented fact in history. FURTHER WARNING: looking over any of these sites can reveal information that will SPOIL the ending of the movie. If you don't like spoilers, view the sites after visiting the theater.

Mothman Lives!

<http://www.mothmanlives.com/>

The Mothman Prophecies, Official Movie Site

<http://www.spe.sony.com/movies/mothman/>

The Unexplained, Section on Mothman  
<http://theunexplainedsite.com/mothman.shtml>

Mothman: The Enigma of Point Pleasant  
<http://www.prairieghosts.com/moth.html>

Mothman: The Bird Who Made It Big (This site covers some of the pop culture/tourist trade that surrounds Mothman)  
<http://members.aol.com/RAllen3673/mothman/>

Sites about Silver Bridge (Site titles not named here to avoid movie spoilers)

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~wvmason/pointpleasant/silver.html>

<http://fbox.vt.edu/users/aschaeff/silver/silver.html>

[http://iti.acns.nwu.edu/clear/bridge/bri\\_dis.html](http://iti.acns.nwu.edu/clear/bridge/bri_dis.html)

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