

Blu-Ray Review: Clint Eastwood's 'Hereafter' Deserves Wider Audience

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 23, 2011 - 8:30pm

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CHICAGO – Every once in awhile the question arises as to which films that were reviewed poorly today will be reappraised in future years as much-better than their first reviews suggested. We always read about movies now considered classics that were underappreciated when they were released and wonder what the equivalent movies will be from today. Let me submit Clint Eastwood's "Hereafter," recently on DVD and Blu-ray, as a likely candidate.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

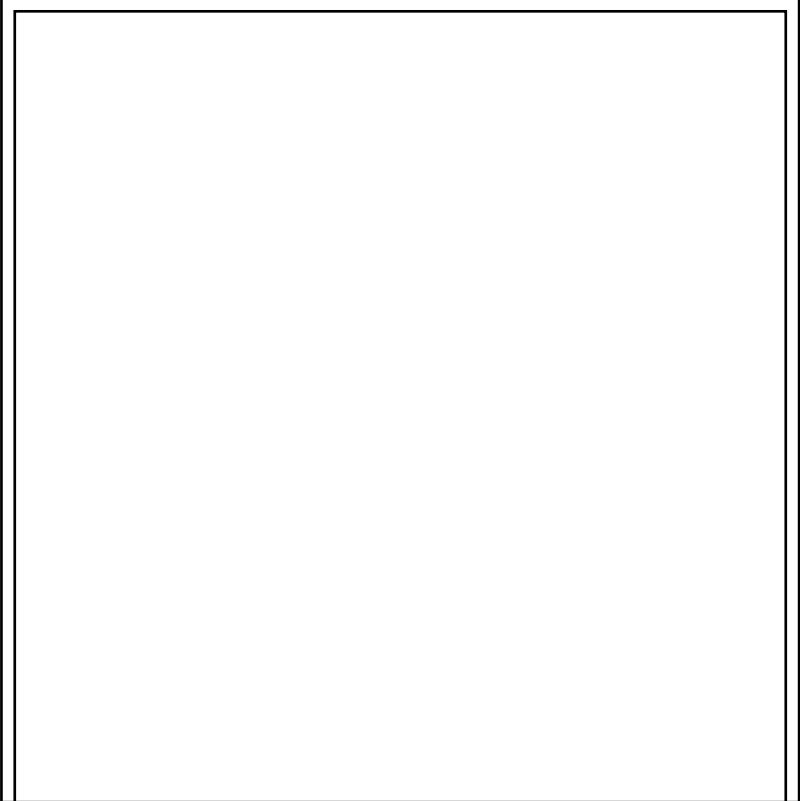
Part of the problem with response to "Hereafter" is that it was a very difficult film to market. Most of the commercials tried to sell Matt Damon in a M. Night Shyamalan-esque supernatural thriller. That's not this movie. Damon's story is only a third of the action, another third is subtitled, and the supernatural elements are more for dramatic dissection than thrills. This is a film that would be widely praised if it was a European offering but was unexpected from one of the most American icons of all time and Jason Bourne. I think those expectations threw off viewers and critics and allowed them to misunderstand this excellent film.



Hereafter was released on Blu-ray and DVD on March 15th, 2011
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Home Video

“Hereafter” is a complex drama about what happens after we die. With a great script by Peter Morgan that plays to Eastwood’s strengths as a director (his best pieces always focus on a small group of characters dealing with a subject that the director finds personally important), “Hereafter” tells three simultaneous stories a la “Babel” but with a much more linear structure. We see a scene from story A, then story B, then story C, and then back to A, back to B, and so on until the final act when the stories pile up on top of each other.

Quoting my theatrical review for the sake of plot:





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Photo credit: Warner Bros. Home Video

"The first story is that of Marie (Cecile De France), a famous French reporter who is introduced on a vacation with her boyfriend. While in a small town buying trinkets, the coastal area is hit with a massive tsunami, a remarkable technical feat to behold and the one time the film seems to display the touch of Executive Producer Steven Spielberg. Marie dies for long enough to see a vision of the other side, something we're shown as blurry shadows and light but that seems like something more concrete to the character. Marie returns to her life but struggles to maintain normalcy now that she knows there's more to death than she previously reported.

The second story is that of George (Matt Damon), one of the rare actual psychics, a man who used to make money off his ability but realized the hard way that speaking to the dead loved ones of emotionally fragile people can make for a rough life. What George sees when he does a reading isn't completely clear. Once again, we see a flash of light and shadow but there are no scenes of ghosts speaking to George or a clear idea as to how he gets his information. It's brilliantly open to interpretation and never "translated" as heaven, purgatory, etc. — merely a variation on the widely-reported visions of light that come with stories of near-death experiences. George meets a gorgeous girl (Bryce Dallas Howard) and has an aggressive brother (Jay Mohr) but essentially keeps to himself.

The third story is that of British twins Marcus and Jason (both alternately played by Frankie & George McLaren). While trying to protect their alcoholic mother and not be sent to foster care, Jason is killed in a car accident, sending Marcus into a state of confusion and despair. He is taken away and given to another family, but spends his days trying to figure out what happened to Jason now that he's dead, visiting false psychics and being generally lost.

All three stories will come together in a final act that feels a bit forced and is easily the weakest material in the piece, but what happens in those first two acts more than makes up for the missteps of the finale."



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Photo credit: Warner Bros. Home Video

Peter Morgan's script for "Hereafter" is the most underrated of 2010. The writer of "The Queen" and "Frost/Nixon" distills the work of Charles Dickens (who is literally referenced several times) into a modern drama, fashioning a film that plays like a variation on "A Christmas Carol" with its ghosts and three distinct adventures into the past (a boy who will never see his brother again), present (a man who sees the other side), and future (a woman who discovers that there's another chapter after death). With excellent dialogue (except for a few cliched lines from Damon about his curse) and a few amazing scenes (including the final one between Damon and Howard), "Hereafter" is poignant without being melodramatic; sentimental without being manipulative.

Technically, "Hereafter" is marvelous as well. Someone said it before me and I wish I could credit who, but it's remarkable that Eastwood's film sort of works in reverse, opening with a tsunami, its biggest scene by far, and ending with a book signing. The movie looks great on Blu-ray. Warner Bros. is still the studio to beat when it comes to new release HD.

As if a movie that needs to be reevaluated isn't enough, Warner Bros. has put together a fantastic release with an entire film as a special feature — "The Eastwood Factor," a documentary about the career of one of history's best filmmakers. The film also comes with a series of "Focus Points" called "Step Into the Hereafter," behind-the-scenes details about the making of the film and its subject matter that can be watched stand-alone or picture-in-picture with the movie. The release also comes with a DVD and digital copy. Watch it anywhere. Just watch it.

'Hereafter' stars Matt Damon, Cecile De France, Frankie McLaren, George McLaren, Bryce Dallas Howard, and Jay Mohr. It was written by Peter Morgan and directed by Clint Eastwood. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD on March 15th, 2011. It is rated PG-13 and runs 129 minutes.



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