

## Blu-ray Review: ‘Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark’ Fails to Deliver Quality Scores

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on January 12, 2012 - 8:40am

- [Bailee Madison](#) [2]
- [Blu-ray Review](#) [3]
- [Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark](#) [4]
- [Guy Pearce](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Katie Holmes](#) [7]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [8]
- [Pan’s Labyrinth](#) [9]
- [Sony Pictures Home Entertainment](#) [10]
- [Troy Nixey](#) [11]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [12]

CHICAGO – Just as Peter Jackson’s adaptation of “The Lovely Bones” suffered from visual over-saturation, writer/producer Guillermo del Toro’s remake of John Newland’s 1973 TV movie succumbs to ineffectual excess. As soon as its fearsome creatures appear for longer than a flash frame, they instantly lose their scare-factor. Didn’t del Toro and his crew learn anything from “Signs”?

Audiences have become so accustomed to the fluid movement of computer animation that it has lost its power to truly terrify. The fantastical beings in del Toro’s 2006 masterpiece, “Pan’s Labyrinth,” benefited from fusions of intricate costumes and nearly seamless digitalized details. It’s clear that the filmmaker is most skilled at making creature features, yet his unrestrained approach is all wrong for “Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark,” which is a thriller that’s meant to play on the mind.



Blu-ray Rating: **2.0/5.0**

Admittedly, del Toro’s one decent contribution to the story was transforming the heroine from a weak woman (played by Kim Darby in the original) to an imaginative nine-year-old girl (Bailee Madison) who’s forced to visit her father (Guy Pearce) and his new girlfriend (Katie Holmes) at a spooky old mansion. Madison is the wonderful young actress who memorably emoted in Jim Sheridan’s remake of “Brothers,” and her performance is the sole bright spot in “Dark.” There are several moments in which cinematographer Oliver Stapleton’s elegant lens pauses for long periods of time on Madison’s face as she projects mixtures of awe and resentment, fear and despair. Her work is so strong that one wishes the effects artists conjured monsters worthy of her reaction shots.



Don't Be Afraid of the Dark was released on Blu-ray and DVD on Jan. 3, 2011.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Unfortunately, first-time feature director and veteran comic book artist Troy Nixey allows far too much screen time for the squadron of demonic weasels (dubbed “tooth fairies”) that enter through an ash pit in the basement. These creatures register as grotesque cartoons, and there isn’t a frame in the picture in which they appear to co-exist with their human co-stars. The script by del Toro and his “Mimic” writing partner Matthew Robbins is covered in plot holes and sticks to the expected assemblage of genre tropes without making any attempt to subvert them. We’ve all seen the moving bookshelves, forbidden corridors and demonic toys that elicit an unsettling recorded squeal of “I Love You.” What’s odd is how inept the filmmakers are at following this by-the-book formula.

As Madison’s exceedingly aloof father, Pearce phones it in to the degree that he starts to appear sinister. Nothing phases this character—not the disappearance of his daughter, nor the mysterious “accident” that left his groundskeeper hospitalized. I can’t imagine his injuries occurring in an accidental manner, unless he was unlucky enough to slip headfirst into a swimming pool filled with screwdrivers.

With the exclusion of a few gratuitous gore effects, “Dark” could’ve easily earned a PG-13 rating. This would’ve allowed the film to be more readily accessible to young audiences, and they are the only ones who stand the chance of being creeped out by this strangely tame fare. All that’s left to jolt adult viewers are loud clangs on the soundtrack. Considering the talent involved in this production, it is a huge letdown. Sam Raimi’s tongue-in-cheek horror opus “Drag Me to Hell” had plenty more scares than “Dark” And at least that film’s laughs were intentional.

“Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio) and includes three glib featurettes masquerading as a 20-minute making-of documentary. One wishes that del Toro would elaborate on how it took him 15 years to find a director that could capture the “whimsical and odd” personality of his intended project. He says that elements of the original film served as an influence on his previous work, but no footage is provided of Newland’s TV movie. Though del Toro’s version clearly fails as a psychological thriller, he reminds viewers that he withheld showing the terrors that lurk within the ash pit (I’m guessing it looks suspiciously like Toon Town). In terms of breaking down the creature effects, the disc offers a solid amount of information. The creature designers discuss how the “fairies” were meant to be evocative of “rats, spiders and old people.” The conceptual art gallery includes a couple genuinely eerie images, but the sad fact is that none of them would be likely to have an impact in the realm of animation. For a vastly superior movie about supernatural terrors, rent the del Toro-produced ghost story, “The Orphanage.”

*'Don't Be Afraid of the Dark' is released by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment and stars Bailee Madison, Katie Holmes, Guy Pearce and Jack Thompson. It was written by Guillermo del Toro and Matthew Robbins and directed by Troy Nixey. It was released on Jan. 3, 2012. It is rated R.*



[13]

By [MATT FAGERHOLM](#) [14]

Staff Writer

HollywoodChicago.com

[matt@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:matt@hollywoodchicago.com) [13]**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 24 2024 - 7:56pm):**<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/17038/blu-ray-review-don-t-be-afraid-of-the-dark-fails-to-deliver-quality-scares>**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/mattmovieman>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/bailee-madison>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/blu-ray-review>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/don-t-be-afraid-of-the-dark>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/guy-pearce>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/katie-holmes>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/matt-fagerholm>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pan-s-labyrinth>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/sony-pictures-home-entertainment>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/troy-nixey>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dvd-theater-tv-news>
- [13] <mailto:matt@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#MATT>