

'Arachnophobia' spins entertaining web of suspense

NEW YORK (CNS) — A young doctor's fear of spiders (arachnophobia) is put to the ultimate test in the thriller "Arachnophobia" (Hollywood Pictures).

Opening in a breath-taking Venezuelan rain forest, the renowned scientist Atherton (Julian Sands) has discovered a new, oversized species of spider. His photographer (Mark L. Taylor) is bitten by one of the highly poisonous arachnids, which then crawls into the victim's casket and is transported to a small town in northern California.

Meanwhile, young Dr. Jennings (Jeff Daniels) has just settled with his family in this rural community, unaware that the venomous creature has taken refuge in his barn, mated with a local spider and is rapidly reproducing an even deadlier strain.

Healthy people start dying for no apparent reason, until Jennings realizes the deaths may be attributable to the one thing he fears most — spiders.

By the time he calls in Atherton to help him locate the primary nest and its original giant male, Jennings' own wife and children are very much in jeopardy, forcing him to directly confront hoards of spiders in a last-ditch effort to save the townspeople.

Director Frank Marshall steadily builds suspense with moody cinematography, careful editing and just enough light moments to make the creepy crawlies bearable.

Actor John Goodman provides the primary comic relief as the glib exterminator who introduces himself to the world-famous entomologist Atherton as a



Ralph Nelson-Hollywood Pictures/Amblin Entertainment
In 'Arachnophobia,' exterminator Delbert McClintock (John Goodman, left) plans an attack against invading spiders, with the help Dr. Jennings (Jeff Daniels, right) and an entomology student.

"colleague."

Everyday household objects become sinister at night as the spiders propagate and Jennings' fears multiply in geometric proportion — aptly demonstrated when he musters the courage to attack what only appears to be a huge spider on his bedroom wall. Such short scenes of tension and near calamity are frequent and well-placed, serving to diffuse the horror of a half-dozen

rather gruesome shots of the spiders' dead victims.

High caliber production values are in keeping with a major movie studio release. The cinematography is particularly noteworthy for its close-ups of individual spiders, making small spiders loom large as fatal foes.

Daniels is entirely sympathetic as the caring doctor, and minor characters such as the gluttonous mortician and his wife are also nicely fleshed out and then disposed of with macabre humor.

The sole disappointment is the film's one glaring inconsistency in the final scene.

The audience discomfort level gets pretty high, but fans of thrillers will appreciate the film's visual design and confident pace of subtle menace laced with wit.

Because of some graphic shots of dead bodies, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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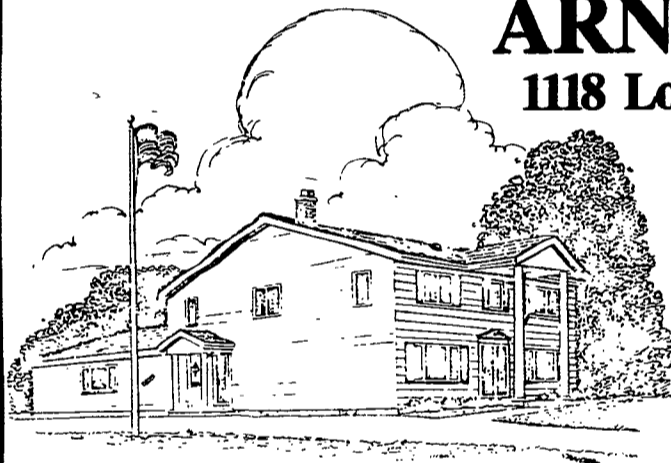
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