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movie review

watch out for 'Watcher'

By MATT MEYER
 Of the Emerald

An ad for "Saturday the 14th" boasts it is "the number-one horror-comedy spoof of the year." The ad is wrong.

"The Watcher in the Woods" has to be the funniest horror picture made this year.

Problem is, the film is supposed to be serious.

A family rents a huge, ancient British house. The owner, an old woman (Bette Davis, of all people), is a little spooky.

As the story goes, her daughter mysteriously disappeared in a fire during a total eclipse of the sun. Suddenly, the two girls of the family, played by Kyle Richards and Lynn-Holly Johnson, start hearing voices and seeing strange things, such as images of a

blindfolded girl, Johnson's age, beckoning to her.

Johnson tries to unravel this deep, dark mystery. The story is full of classic lines from the wide-eyed, pouty-mouthed Johnson, like the ominous, "I don't know why, but I feel that something **terrible** has happened here," or the determined, "I'm not sure exactly why, Mom, but this is something I've just gotta do."

"Watcher in the Woods" is — well, incredible.

It's extremely difficult to grant Johnson credibility, no matter how pouty she gets. Kyle Richards is such a precocious little sister that you start to hope she'll be found hanging in one of the gnarled trees that are constantly popping up throughout the picture.

David McCallum, who plays

the girls' father, is so embarrassed that he disappears for half of the movie, presumably to rejoin the U.N.C.L.E. forces.

Even Bette Davis shows up badly in this picture. She gets so crotchety you begin to wonder why her daughter would possibly want to return from the time warp imprisoning her.

Although director John Hough hasn't spent much time working with his cast, he has been doing his homework. He seems to have watched "Jaws" enough to copy Spielberg's little jabs: a big buildup to a dinky joke, shockers that come from out of nowhere and comic relief when we're scared by a flapping bird, only to be zapped five seconds later by something **really** scary.

Unlike "Jaws," the characters aren't even remotely believable, and the whole escapade becomes a farce.

Surprisingly enough, there are good points to the movie. Special effects are numerous, and, on the whole, pretty good. The camera work is very good, but unfortunately Hough turns the camera to foggy dales or old "trees" whenever he can't think of anything else to shoot.

Luckily, the film was shot in a picturesque part of Scotland, and even the repetitive trees come out well.

It's too bad it all goes to waste. The film crumbles when the exceptionally weak script gives way. Even TV's Nancy Drew wouldn't take an hour to figure out that a black circle overlapping a picture of the sun might be related to a solar eclipse.

Even Shaun Cassidy as a Hardy Boy could figure it out. But not Lynn-Holly Johnson.

After the previews were over, Walt Disney's company name, Buena Vista, flashed on the screen over a sea of orange. "Oh, good," my wife said, "a cartoon!"

She was right.



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