



"The Happening," M. Night Shyamalan's new film suffers from uneven pacing, drama.

## Lack of suspense hurts 'Happening'

By Kam Williams  
Sentinel-Voice

Upon the release of "The Sixth Sense" in 1999, M. Night Shyamalan was heralded as the heir apparent to Alfred Hitchcock's mantle as the master of suspense. However, the once-celebrated wunderkind's stock has fallen over the intervening years because each of his subsequent offerings has been generally disappointing due to the identical failing.

The trouble is that his adventures rely on rabbit-out-of-the-hat revelations which retroactively render the rest of what you've just watched inconsequential.

In "The Sixth Sense," the element of surprise was the discovery that Bruce Willis' character had been knocked off during the opening scene. In "The Village," it was the fact that the tale was actually set in the present, not in the 19th Century as implied. And so forth.

Consequently, Shyamalan's critics have deemed him a one-trick pony undeserving of his lofty status as a cinematic genius. Now, perhaps in response to his detractors, he has crafted "The Happening" with a more-transparent twist than usual. Unfortunately, by dropping hints periodically throughout the picture, the upshot is that the audience is likely to be left wondering "Is that it?" as the closing credits roll.

The film opens in New York during the morning rush hour in the vicinity of Central Park as people begin exhibiting bizarre behavior which starts with catatonia and disorientation and culminates with them calmly committing suicide in a variety of ways. Given the memory of

9/11, it is no surprise that the authorities would jump to the conclusion that the city has been hit by another terrorist attack, this involving the release of a toxin into the atmosphere.

The setting quickly shifts to a classroom in a Philadelphia high school where science teacher Elliot Moore (Mark Wahlberg) just happens to be leading a classroom discussion about why the honey bees have been disappearing lately.

He suggests that "there are forces at work beyond human understanding." Hint-hint. Cue the "Twilight Zone" theme song.

But before he has a chance to elaborate further, the faculty is summoned to the auditorium where the principal (Alan Ruck) informs them about the terrorist attack and summarily cancels classes for the rest of the day. Soon, the folks in Philly are becoming infected with the same self-destructive urges as witnessed around Manhattan.

So, Elliot and his pal, math teacher Julian (John Leguizamo), decide to make a break by train to a presumably safe haven in the country. En route, they pick up a couple of loved ones in the former's estranged wife, Alma (Zooey Deschanel), and the latter's little daughter, Jess (Ashlyn Sanchez). Together, the four then embark on a valiant struggle to survive the godforsaken plague which has descended upon the northeast from Massachusetts to Maryland.

Besides telegraphing what's really at the root of the havoc, "The Happening" is beset by a number of glaring flaws. First, the acting is atrocious. (See Happening, Page 6)

## Watts eyes Black news

Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) — J.C. Watts, the last Black Republican to serve in the U.S. House, reportedly plans to create a new national Black television news channel.

Watts hopes to get his Black Television News Channel running by late next year. "We hope to be the single destination for reliable, credible, informational resources for the African-American community," said Watts, a former star football quarterback.

The proposed channel has agreements with Dishnet and Comcast.

Watts said his proposed nonpartisan

news channel would show the diversity of opinion among Blacks.

"Most Black people don't think alike; most Black people just vote alike" for Democrats, said Watts. He has expressed disappointment that his party hasn't undertaken greater efforts to make inroads with Black voters.

Watts retired from the House in 2003 and formed a marketing and lobbying company in Washington, D.C.

Tom Gilbert, executive director of Television Week in Los Angeles, said Watts is trying to crack "a really tough market" and it won't be easy.

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