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WESTWORD

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New installment in Lecter cycle adds nothing new

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Hannibal Rising
Directed by Peter Webber
Starring: Gaspard Ulliel
Li Gong
Rhys Ifans
Rated "R"

In the recently-released gorefest *Hannibal Rising*, viewers get a look into the terrifying childhood of future cannibal Hannibal Lecter (Gaspard Ulliel, in his English-language film debut), made famous as an adult by Anthony Hopkins in *Silence of the Lambs*, *Red Dragon* and *Hannibal*. Like the other three films, *Hannibal Rising* is adapted from one of the tetralogy of novels by Thomas Harris, but it is the first "prequel" in the series.

The movie begins when young Hannibal and his family flee from their house in Lithuania during world war two. The family goes to a cottage farther off the main roads.

Before the family can even settle in, they are disturbed by a Russian tank. The tank merely needs water, but in the meantime, Nazi planes begin to fly overhead, pummeling the ground with as many rounds as they can muster. The only ones spared are Hannibal and his baby sister Mischa.

Nazis soon discover Hannibal and his sister. When the men find there is nothing to eat in the cottage, the cannibalistic foreshadowing begins.

The men turn on the children in a predictable move. Mischa is the "meatier" of the two, so the men choose to eat her. Eventually Hannibal's torturers flee when the house is hit with a bomb.

An approaching army shortly rescues Hannibal. The movie fast-forwards eight years when Hannibal is in an orphanage for boys. Conveniently, the orphanage is set up in the original Lecter house. It is here that viewers first see Hannibal's tendencies towards violence.



Eventually Hannibal sets out on his own and comes to his dead uncle's house. His late uncle's stunningly beautiful wife greets him. Lady Murasaki (*Memoirs of a Geisha's* Li Gong) welcomes Hannibal and forms what will become an appropriate relationship with the boy.

Under Murasaki's care Hannibal learns of the samurai traditions and adopts the face mask many recall Anthony Hopkins wearing in *Silence of the Lambs*. The audience watches as Murasaki teaches Hannibal how to use a samurai sword.

Hannibal and his aunt quickly move to Paris upon Hannibal's being admitted to medical school. The school is yet another way to show Hannibal's sick obsession with body parts.

Once in Paris, Hannibal learns where his sister's killers may be. Upon learning, he makes a trip back to his hometown only to come upon one of the men who held him captive. He brutally murders him after learning where another man from the group is. Hannibal enjoys his first taste of human blood as he licks it off his lips upon spattering the former Nazi's hemoglobin everywhere.

When the police begin to investigate, they learn Hannibal is quite the chef, having made a dinner of his victim's cheeks and mushrooms. As he avenges the deaths one by one, they become increasingly more violent.

Hannibal knocks out all the killers, leaving Grutus (Rhys Ifans) as one of the last. His first attempt to kill him is a fail-

ure and Grutus takes his aunt captive to get to Hannibal.

Hannibal learns where Grutus is located and decides to take another stab at killing him. Grutus shoots Hannibal in the back, and in the film's cheesiest moment, the audience realizes he has survived because of the samurai sword hidden under his jacket. Grutus reveals to Hannibal that he too ate part of his own sister. He takes that indignity out on his victim, violently slashing and stabbing him despite his aunt's pleas.

Needless to say his aunt runs to find police as the boat that she was just on blows up. Fleeing, she notices him on the riverbank as he disappears into the trees. At this point, the audience may be relieved that the movie is over, only to find out that it is not. Hannibal still has one last head to collect in Canada. He makes his last killing and goes onto what fans of the series know will be many more in the United States.

As the synopsis illustrates, this is not a particularly well-scripted film, but to their credit, the actors do their utmost to make the most of a bad situation.

Ulliel plays the character of Hannibal with eerie effortlessness. He plays up all of the characteristics of a cannibal quite well, coming off as cold, heartless and detached.

Ifans (*Notting Hill*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Replacements*) makes just as good a murderer as Ulliel. His uncaring nature almost makes the audience glad to know Hannibal has something terrible in store for him.

Gong's performance is also not one to be forgotten. The sexual tension she creates with her co-star is undeniable.

If only Peter Webber's direction did justice to the performances as it did in 2003's *Girl with the Pearl Earring*. Some of the scenes are unnecessary and can become confusing. The samurai scene with Hannibal and his aunt seems misplaced. It doesn't add anything that helps the audience to figure out why Hannibal prefers human flesh to a nice steak.

Despite the fact that blood is expected from this movie, it seems a little too much. It's not that individual scenes become excessively violent or gory; they just become very redundant, lending new meaning to the term *ad nauseam*.

Though *Hannibal Rising* is not a complete loss, it is much too over-the-top. Even for those who can easily tolerate blood and gore, it seems overdone. The plot is interesting yet confusing and doesn't completely explain why "Hannibal the Cannibal" prefers human flesh. Ultimately, the film adds little or nothing to Lecter legacy and leaves the viewer wondering why the film was produced at all.