

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

USA

2001

116 minutes

15 certificate

Director: Joel Coen and (uncredited) Ethan Coen

Written by:
Ethan and Joel Coen

Cinematography by
Roger Deakins

Film Editing by
Ethan Coen (as Roderick Jaynes)
Joel Coen (as Roderick Jaynes)
Tricia Cooke

Original Music by Carter Burwell



Cast:

Billy Bob Thornton	Edward 'Ed' Crane
Frances McDormand	Doris Crane
Michael Badalucco	Frank
James Gandolfini	David 'Big Dave' Brewster
Katherine Borowitz	Ann Nirdlinger
Jon Polito	Creighton Tolliver
Scarlett Johansson	Rachel 'Birdy' Abundas
Richard Jenkins	Walter Abundas
Tony Shalhoub	Freddy Riedenschneider
Christopher Kriesa	Persky
Brian Haley	Krebs
Jack McGee	Burns
Gregg Binkley	The New Man
Alan Fudge	Diedrickson
Lilyan Chauvin	Medium

Whenever you see the Coen brothers name beside a film title, you know that you are in for a memorable experience. The Man Who Wasn't There is no exception.

There are usually two kinds of Coen Brothers films. One kind is their wild, brilliant pictures of insanity. The other is their wild, brilliant, arty pictures of insanity. Though engrossing, beautiful to look at and respectable as a viable slice of filmmaking, "The Man Who Wasn't There" is to my mind a little more "Barton Fink" than "Fargo" – I did not enjoy the former.



Joel and Ethan Coen have built their careers on making fascinating films that feature vibrant, colorful characters, in way over their heads in dangerous situations. The plot is reminiscent of other Coen brothers films where inept characters try to orchestrate a blackmail scheme – most notably "Raising Arizona," "Fargo" and "The Big Lebowski".

"The Man Who Wasn't There" is the Coen brothers' attempt at a 1940s-style film noir, complete with the black-and-white photography. The film stars Billy Bob Thornton as Ed Crane, a barber in a small town in northern California. He works for his brother-in-law Frank (Michael Badalucco), who talks incessantly about anything and everything. Ed, on the other hand, rarely says a word. In fact, Thornton has far more lines in his voiceover narration than he does onscreen.



Billy Bob Thornton is very solid in his performance as Ed Crane. He is incredibly still and quiet and subdued. What he needs, though, is more colourful (no pun intended) characters around him.

However despite a fine performance by Billy Bob Thornton, the most outstanding work of the film comes from cinematographer Roger Deakins and his luxurious black and white photography. Deakins was nominated for an Oscar for Best Cinematography, although he lost out to Andrew Lesnie for The Lord of the Rings – The Fellowship of the Ring. Perhaps more importantly, the Coen Brothers' story would be lost without his fabulous work.



Indeed Deakins work is extraordinary to behold, as the time and effort that goes into the lighting schemes and camera placement looks as though it took years to perfect. Deakins captures the mood through shadows and heaps of cigarette smoke, making each scene stand alone with its sumptuous lighting design

However, one does wonder what does it say of the film that the cinematography has been lauded above anything else?

"The Man Who Wasn't There" is slow, certainly, maybe even meandering, but the emotional pull of the finale belies anything you might expect from a Coens movie.

Iain McGlashan

BILLY BOB THORNTON • FRANCES McDORMAND • JAMES GANDOLFINI

THE LAST THING ON HIS MIND IS MURDER.

"WONDERFUL...
A MAGNIFICENT NOIR FOLLOWS
"BILLY BOB THORNTON IS THE
SUPERMAN"

"EXCELLENT...
THIS IS THE COEN BROTHERS AT FULL STRENGTH"

"BARRING SUE, ANDY AND
RAY, A PERFECT FILM"

"A DELIGHT"
"BRAVURA SCENARIOS
GREAT PERFORMANCES, A RAZZLE-DAZZLE SCRIPT
AND STUNNING CINEMATOGRAPHY"

WINNER
BEST DIRECTOR
2001 CANNES
FILM FESTIVAL

A FILM BY JOEL COEN AND ETHAN COEN

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE.

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