



Most of the time, when I go to the movies (or watch something on DVD), my reaction is kind of a status quosome shrug. A movie that does what it sets out to do – no more and no less – can be reasonably entertaining and acceptable as a distraction from the real world. But sometimes movies surprise me.

These surprises can be positive or negative. A negative surprise occurs when I go to something that received rave reviews or Oscar nominations, and it turns out to be awful (Terrence Malick, I hope your ears are ringing). On the other hand, sometimes I watch a movie with low – or no – expectations, and it turns out to be great. I love it when that happens.

*Moonrise Kingdom* wins the "I surprised Kristin" award. In this case, I went in with low expectations. I had yet to see a Wes Anderson film I liked and had pretty much written him off as one of those filmmakers that I just wasn't ever going to "get." Turns out, I was just waiting for him to find his stride.

*Moonrise Kingdom* is delightful in every way. The story gracefully combines a lighthearted playfulness with a compelling dramatic weight. Every character, whether central to the story or simply populating the background, is unique and brilliantly portrayed by a cast of both well-known adult actors and surprisingly mature youngsters. And the craftsmanship is flawless, from the direction to the cinematography, to the score, to everything in between.

I don't know if the Academy will notice *Moonrise Kingdom* in the midst of all the high-concept fare promised this Oscar Season (Stephen Spielberg, I hope your ears are ringing), but I would love to see it at least earn an original screenplay nomination. If it receives additional nods, they'll be well deserved.

Final Grade: A