

Return To Silent Hill The Return to Disappointment

A Review by Sydney Buckholt

They had it. It was literally handed to them with grace and confidence that they would give the fans what they've wanted all along; a decent adaption to one of the best psychological thriller video games in the world. So, what went wrong?

Return To Silent Hill is the latest adaptation from Christoph Gans who gave us the now cult classic Silent Hill back in 2006. While his previous work has found new footing amongst the fans, his most recent has put him back in the fog, so to speak.

As someone who has spent hours traversing through the titular town, guiding my emotionally torn protagonist through the nightmares, I can honestly say that this film is by far the biggest disappointment. This is not to say the other adaptations were any better but this one just felt as if he wasn't even trying to give us anything but mediocre horror film. Here's my honest opinion on Return to Silent Hill.

What The Hell Is A "Silent Hill"?

For those of you who went into this film blind and can't wrap your head around a town engulfed in ash, Silent Hill is a psychological horror game that was released for the PlayStation in 1999 by the popular gaming developer Konami. Despite a rocky release, and a few "bugs" with the gameplay, the game surpassed massive popularity across the world. The game has since had multiple sequels, spin-offs, and of course film adaptations.

Why Are We "Returning" to Silent Hill?

This is where my annoyance started with this film adaptation. To say *Return to Silent Hill* indicates that our protagonist James Sunderland (Jeremy Irvine) escaped once and now is coming back for more. However, if you've played Silent Hill 2 (Jame's story) you'll realize that he's *never left*. I'd love nothing more than to go into the deep rabbit hole that is Jame's story but I'll let you play the game for yourselves. The remake of Silent Hill 2 released in October of 2025 and it is spectacular. Do yourself a favor and forget everything you've seen from this atrocity and play the real story. Trust me on this one, its worth it.

Video Games turned into Films Are Hard To Do

I hear you loud and clear and I agree wholeheartedly. Which is why when filmmakers decide they want to tackle something that has already gained a loyal fanbase, they're usually either trying to bank off the royalties of the die-hard fans for a quick buck or they may actually have something new and fresh they want to throw into the mix. I'm honestly not sure who the target audience for this film was.

Gans has a solid history of making adaptations which include Silent Hill (2000), Beauty and the Beast (2014), and Necronomicon (1993), an anthology of H.P. Lovecraft stories. Needless to say, him coming back to tackle yet another adaptation isn't surprising. What *is* surprising, or should I say suspicious, is that he chose to do this right around the time Silent Hill was making a huge comeback in the gaming world. So, was this for the fans or was this just to make a quick buck?

It Can't All Be Bad...Can It?

Oh, but it can. Let's look past the 14% Rotten Tomatoes Score and average rate of 1.5 out of 5 on Letterboxed for a moment and go over a few things.

CASTING

James Sunderland is clearly in his mid to late 40s in the video game yet here he is in the film adaption looking as if he just walked across the stage at All Hallows High School to receive his diploma.

Mary/Maria (Hannah Emily Anderson) was not giving what needed to be given when it came to her VERY important characters mainly due to the fact that they made Maria look like a high class escort rather than the haunting manifestation of James's desires.

PLOT

The story jumps so much that even I was having trouble trying to keep up with where we were and I've played the game an ungodly amount of times. If nothing at all, Gans could have at least kept the most pivotal parts from the game that would have translated perfectly in the film. Instead, he gave us his imagination of what James was going through. And while I appreciate the effort in giving James and Mary a little backstory, in doing so, he muddled the hell out of the very thing that made the game such an emotional punch when it comes to its end. None of the scenes were as powerful as they could have been and I'm not sure if I should blame it on the writing, the directing, or both.

Final Thoughts

The biggest sin *Return to Silent Hill* commits isn't simply that it strays from the source material. Adaptations change things all the time. The problem here is that the film misunderstands the very soul of what made *Silent Hill 2* so powerful in the first place. The game thrived on dread that crept under your skin, a slow psychological unraveling that forced players to confront grief, guilt, and self-delusion. This film trades that layered horror for hollow spectacle and scattered storytelling. It feels less like a careful translation of a beloved narrative and more like someone vaguely remembering it after reading a wiki summary at 3 a.m.

Moments that should land with emotional devastation barely register. Scenes that once carried heavy symbolic meaning are reduced to visual callbacks without context or weight. Pyramid Head appears because fans expect him, not because the story understands why he exists. The fog rolls in, monsters shuffle about, and yet somehow the film feels strangely empty. It checks boxes instead of building tension. The psychological torment that defined James Sunderland's journey has been flattened into something oddly generic.

What hurts the most is knowing that the blueprint for a phenomenal film already existed. The game did the hard work years ago. All the filmmakers had to do was trust it. Instead, what we're left with is a muddled, confused interpretation that never justifies its own existence.

In the end, *Return to Silent Hill* doesn't feel like a return at all. It feels like getting lost on the way back.

Rating: 2/10

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