



## M. Night Shyamalan's Devil

There are two categories of movie-goers: those who love M. Night Shyamalan's films, and those who despise them. I count myself among those who thoroughly enjoy the works of Shyamalan and would add his newest film, *Devil*, to his repertoire of great productions. Known for his use of the classic "twist," Shyamalan deviates slightly from his previous films in that the ending of *Devil* does not include a twist, but shockingly, a valuable Christian message.



*Devil* is the first film of the "Night Chronicles," an ongoing series of Shyamalan-produced horror pictures. It focuses on five people trapped in the elevator of an upscale office building. Unbeknownst to the elevator riders, however, one who stands among them is the Devil himself, though the intruder has taken on a far more pleasing form. The five people do not find themselves on the elevator together at random, either. Each man and woman has committed crimes ranging from thievery and assault to blackmail, battery, and murder.

Quoting from 1 Peter: 5-8, the start of the film reads: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." The plot of the film is true to the quote, as the Devil among the elevator riders seeks to torture and punish those who have shown themselves to be capable of evil. Following the quote, a narrator lays the foundation of the plot, that the Devil is invoked by suicide — a sin to Christians, Jews, and believers in other Abrahamic faiths — and does not rest until he has tormented some of those whose actions have condemned them to eternal damnation.

When Detective Bowden (Chris Messina) is summoned to solve the mystery of a horrific suicide, he has no idea how convoluted the mystery will become. The building from which the suicide victim has jumped is that where the elevator riders find themselves trapped. Adopting a very Rod Serling *Twilightesque* storyline, the riders quickly turn against one another, as they are manipulated by the Devil to judge one another and behave aggressively.

Already struggling with demons of his own, Detective Bowden is ill-prepared for what he witnesses on the elevator cameras, his only glimpse into the elevator action as the Devil places obstacles in the path of those attempting to save the riders. Fortunately, he is assisted by one building security guard, Ramirez (Jacob Vargas), whose Christian faith prepares him for the utter horror about to befall the



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elevator riders. As Ramirez begins to connect the trauma before him to the workings of the Devil, Bowden is unconvinced that it is the work of the Devil until he finds himself without any other explanation. It does not take long for Bowden to begin questioning Ramirez about what to expect next.

Overall, *Devil* bears Shyamalan's signature. It is not a "horror" film in the standard sense of the word, but rather is a profound exploration of the timeless battle of "good versus evil." Likewise, it is a psychological thriller forcing viewers to question their own integrity as moviegoers are confronted with the brutal reality that "It is the lies we tell ourselves that introduce us to [the Devil]. Since the elevator riders' flawed characters prevent them from admitting their own guilt, they are prime for the Devil's picking.

Most importantly, while *Devil* provides a glimpse into the power of the Devil, it highlights the greater power of God and repentance.

It is for these reasons, however, that *Devil* has not received a positive response from big news organizations like New York's *Daily News* and *Entertainment Weekly*. Too many Americans are uncomfortable with the concepts of "good" and "evil" as they have adapted a relative view of most things, believing instead that there is a gray area to most issues. Shyamalan sheds those theories and instead adheres to the doctrine that sin is sin, whether it is blackmail or murder. And as the Bible says, "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more."

However, while the film boasts a variety of positive attributes, it is certainly not going to be a contender for Movie of the Year for a variety of reasons.

First, devoid of prominent actors, the performances in the *Devil* are not apt to attract the attention of the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), though if truth be told, they surpass those of well-known actors and actresses like Keanu Reeves and Jennifer Lopez.

Also, both the scene transitions and dialogue are awkward at times.

Likewise, the film's soundtrack is somewhat cheesy, though it may have been Shyamalan's intent, as he often seems to attempt to emulate the work of the great Alfred Hitchcock.

Viewers may also be confused by Ramirez's seemingly unending knowledge of the behaviors of the Devil, particularly since much of it is based on folklore rather than on traditional Christian doctrine.

Finally, those entering the theater hoping to see stunning visuals and action-packed scenes will find themselves utterly disappointed. On the other hand, films that include these features typically do so to mask the absence of content and quality, an issue that does not plague *Devil*.

A warning to parents: *Devil* is full of violence, though most of the violent scenes take place out of view in the dark of the elevator. However, that does not preclude viewers from being greeted by pleasantries like shards of mirror protruding from a person's jugular vein.

In short, leave the kids home for this one.

*Photo: M. Night Shyamalan, left, producer of the film Devil, arrives with his wife Bhavna Vaswani at the premiere of the film in West Hollywood, Calif., Sept. 15, 2010.: AP Images*



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