

## Film Review: ‘Saw’ Creators Fall Just Short of True Scares With ‘Insidious’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 1, 2011 - 11:42am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – I have written over a thousand reviews and have rarely been as conflicted as I am about my response to James Wan’s “Insidious.” It comes down to this question — do you judge the effort or the execution? I love what Wan and co-writer Leigh Whannell (the team behind “Saw,” working this time with the producers of “Paranormal Activity”) are attempting with their unique ghost story, one that clearly pays homage to an old-fashioned style of horror filmmaking, but I don’t think they quite pull it off. Ultimately, a movie doesn’t exist in theory, only up on the screen, and that’s where “Insidious” doesn’t quite work as well as this classic horror fan truly wished it would.

At its best, “Insidious” has echoes of “Poltergeist” or the original “The Haunting,” the kind of movies they don’t really make any more as horror has become all about last-minute twists, excessive gore, or ludicrous special effects. “Insidious” was shot entirely on-set and with enemies that are clearly sharing the same space as the protagonists, not created via CGI or green screen. Recognizing that an open door with a screeching alarm or a shadowy figure crossing a balcony are much scarier than anything that can be created on an iMac is a lesson that should be learned by more horror movie producers. To that end, I love what James Wan is going for with “Insidious.”



[Read Brian Tallerico’s full review of “Insidious” in our reviews section.](#) [16]

But “going for” and “accomplishing” are two different things. The problem with “Insidious” is that Wan doesn’t have the skill for atmosphere of a Robert Wise or Tobe Hooper and haunted house movies are ALL about atmosphere. And, while I won’t spoil anything here, the film takes a sharp turn as it tries to become “something more” than just an average ghost story and it simply gets away from Whannell and Wan. “Insidious” actually would have worked best without twists or attempts at unique takes on the well-worn genre. The fact is that we haven’t seen an excellent old-fashioned American ghost story in quite some time and “Insidious” could have been that movie without the bells and whistles of the final act. At its foundation, it’s a movie I like. It’s what’s built on that foundation that’s troubling.

The foundation I speak of is a basic “haunted family” story. Josh (Patrick Wilson) and Renai (Rose Byrne) move into a new home with their two young boys. One goes to play in the attic where he hears a disturbing sound and takes a fall. The next night, he goes to bed and doesn’t wake up. He’s not dead and not in a normal coma. In fact, doctors can’t figure out what the heck is wrong with him. He just won’t wake up. But increasingly unusual events around the home, including shadowy figures and even a bloody claw mark on her son’s bed convince Renai that there’s more going on with her child than a medical problem.



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*“Insidious” stars Patrick Wilson, Rose Byrne, Lin Shaye, Leigh Whannell, Angus Sampson, and Barbara Hershey. It was written by Whannell and directed by James Wan. It is rated PG-13 and runs 101 minutes. It opens on April 1st, 2011.*



Insidious

*Photo credit: Film District*

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