

## Awful Execution Fails Clever Concept of 'Devil'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 17, 2010 - 2:51am

- [Bojana Novakovic](#) [2]
- [Bokeem Woodbine](#) [3]
- [Brian Nelson](#) [4]
- [Chris Messina](#) [5]
- [Devil](#) [6]
- [Geoffrey Arend](#) [7]
- [Jacob Vargas](#) [8]
- [Jenny O'Connell](#) [9]
- [John Erick Dowdle](#) [10]
- [Logan Marshall-Green](#) [11]
- [M. Night Shyamalan](#) [12]
- [Matt Craven](#) [13]
- [Movie Review](#) [14]



Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Being a hardcore fan of anthology series like “The Twilight Zone” and “Tales From the Crypt,” the simple set-up of “Devil,” the new horror film based on a story by and produced by M. Night Shyamalan, intrigued me — five people are stuck in an elevator and one turns out to be the devil. Sadly, the concept is the only interesting thing about this horribly-executed tale from the dull side of the genre.

With no characters worth caring about, a heavy reliance on a mystery and a final-act twist, and absolutely no sense of suspense, “Devil” completely blows the chance to build on what could have been an effective story. We all get on elevators and have no idea who might be standing next to us. The idea that we’re all on that elevator for a reason and it’s one that involves the proof that God and the Devil exist is a fun one for a fall horror movie. It’s just too bad no one made that movie.



Devil

Photo credit: Universal

One of the main reasons that “Devil” fails is the decision by writer Brian Nelson (working from a story by Shyamalan) and director John Erick Dowdle (“Quarantine”) to make the lead a character not trapped in the elevator. Instead, we spend most of the brief running time of “Devil” with a Detective (Chris Messina of “Vicky Christina Barcelona”) investigating the strange happenings inside. If there’s anything less



suspenseful in horror this year than watching reaction shots of someone watching a security camera recording I can't think of what it would be.

Of course, our detective comes with some emotional baggage of his own — his wife and son were killed in a hit-and-run five years ago — and has consequently stopped believing in God. "Devil" will change his mind about all-powerful beings by putting one in an elevator with four victims. It starts when an old lady (Jenny O'Hara), a young woman (Bojana Novakovic), a security guard (Bokeem Woodbine), a mechanic (Logan Marshall-Green), and a mattress salesman (Geoffrey Arend) get stuck a few dozen floors above ground level. It's not long before the lights go out and one of them ends up dead. Who's doing the killing? How can they be stopped? What twist does Night have up his sleeve this time?

The question never asked by the creators of "Devil" is "Why should we care?" Messina does his best to add a genuine quality to a film that's seriously lacking in it but the mystery of the piece forces the quintet at its core to remain paper-thin. If we know too much about a certain character, we may realize they're not the ultimate bad guy. The decision to make the five characters so forgettable permeates the entire film. If we don't really care about what's going down on the elevator, it's easy to lose interest in the entire piece.



Devil

Photo credit: Universal

A film like "Devil" needs two simple things to work — claustrophobia and a ticking clock. We need to have a well-defined space in which we can feel the walls pressing in on these characters and we need to have a sense of how long they've been in there slowly losing their minds. Both of these elements are completely ignored in "Devil." The camerawork in the elevator never gives the feeling of claustrophobia because Dowdle never really defines the space and we never have any sense how long things are taking between major events. There's a brilliant version of "Devil" that rarely leaves the elevator and is told in real-time. If you just close your eyes and imagine that movie, you'll probably have a better time than paying to see "Devil."

With a nifty idea and a few decent performances, "Devil" avoids worst-of-the-year categorization but it's easily one of 2010's most forgettable films. It's never once scary, never once suspenseful, and doesn't really end up saying anything about Satan or God. In the end, I almost wanted "Devil" to be WORSE; to go completely off-the-rails in an orgy of Night-esque twists piling on top of each other. I just wanted anything to alleviate the boredom. It's not unlike being stuck in an elevator yourself for 80 minutes with someone who wants to tell you their feelings on the devil and his heavenly alternate. Although that probably wouldn't be this boring.

*'Devil' stars Chris Messina, Logan Marshall-Green, Jenny O'Hara, Bojana Novakovic, Bokeem Woodbine, Geoffrey Arend, Jacob Vargas, and Matt Craven. It was written by Brian Nelson from a story by M. Night Shyamalan and directed by John Erick Dowdle. It opens on September 17th, 2010. It is rated PG-13.*



[15]

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