Effective Scare Factor & Teenage Traumas Define 'IT'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 7, 2017 - 4:56am

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Rating: **3.5**/5.0

CHICAGO – "IT" is the kind of film that relies on jump-scares and ghastly images a bit too much, but behind it all is a quirky story – based on a Stephen King novel – about that time in childhood where becoming a teenager and finding a way within the change is adventurous and unsettling.

The film takes awhile to find its feet, and has the feel of a Steven Spielberg kids adventure movie (think "E.T" or "The Goonies"), yet with its intense horror sequences and screwed up violence it almost ends up a parody of those movies. Also there is extreme trauma done to the child-to-teen characters, which factor into what they are facing against an evil clown. Having not read the source novel or known the story before coming in, it seemed that the director Andy Muschietti took the essence of a previous Stephen King adaptation, "Stand by Me," and created a parallel horror universe for the same situation – kids having one last summer being kids – but in this case they are going to pay for sticking their noses into a mystery. By the way, unless you want your kids to be nightmarish for an extended length of time, keep them out of this film for now (yeah, they'll catch up to it on the digital release). "IT" capitalizes on their every fear.

Every 27 years the town of Derry, Maine, goes through a cycle of missing children. In 1989, it begins to happen again, including the eight year-old brother of Bill (Jaeden Lieberher). The older sibling has tremendous guilt associated with the disappearance, and begins to obsess over the last moments his brother had, which involved the sewer systems of the town and the legend of a circus clown called Pennywise (Bill Skarsgard).

Pennywise the Clown (Bill Skarsgard) is the Terrorizing Force in 'IT'
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

When school lets out for the summer, a gang of Bill's friends agree to help him explore the sewers for clues, including Richie (Finn Wolfhard), Eddie (Jack Dylan Grazer) and Stanley (Wyatt Oleff). They begin to see strange sights, including Pennywise, and it also begins to happen to the girl-crush of the group, Beverly (Sophia Lillis). They are joined by another "loser" – as the local bullies call them – an African American boy named Mike (Chosen Jacobs). They all have their reasons for crushing the demon clown.

All these youngish eight-grade characters are feeling their hormonal oats, and "it" is easy to connect the dots between the emergence of adolescence and the fears of childhood. Everybody eventually flies from the nest, but within that protective custody is the fear of what is outside those boundaries. When we become teenagers, all those notions are tested. I don't know if the novel played on those themes, but the film version does flesh them out… literally, in a scene where the boys ogle the underwear-clad Beverly while she sunbathes.

The archetype kids (fat, sickly, nerdy, bookish) are all present in the gang, but all their stereotypes are used against them by Pennywise, in an over-the-top performance by Bill Skarsgard. Their traumas and insecurities are real, and are exaggerated by the visions that the clown produces. This symbolism hits us over the head, but the horror visions are bizarre and effective, despite being very extreme (apparently the town of Derry doesn't have law enforcement).

Summer of Scare: The Gang Figures it Out in 'IT'
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

The film is also unnecessarily cruel, especially in regard to the bullies that harass the main gang, and the traumas that are conjured by Pennywise would give real kids nightmares for years (again, warning). "IT" also relies on "BOO!" scares that pop up frequently, so much that it becomes annoying at times, and the design of the creatures associated with Pennywise look like they're auditioning for next month's run of haunted houses. But there was enough in the film to make it more than the surface horror, and that is what now traumatized adults will be thinking of as they leave the theater.

And of course, the title of this movie would make an epic post-modern Abbott & Costello routine.. "Are you going to the movies to see 'IT'?" "What?" "'IT'" "What is 'IT'?" "The movie!" "What!" "'IT!'" "I don't give a damn." "He's the shortstop."

"IT" opens everywhere on September 8th. Featuring Jaeden Lieberther, Jeremy Ray Taylor, Sophia Lillis, Finn Wolfhard, Chosen Jacobs, Jack Dylan Grazer, Wyatt Oleff and Bill Skarsgard. Screenplay adapted by Chase Palmer, Cary Fukunaga and Gary Dauberman, based on a novel by Stephen King. Directed by Andy Muschietti. Rated "R"

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