

‘Spiral: From the Book of Saw’ is a Horror Ouroboros Devouring Itself

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on May 19, 2021 - 5:59pm

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Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – If you find yourself reading this review, you likely understand how much a film can influence society. Despite our best efforts, we don’t get to decide how or why something gets added to our zeitgeist. Its staying power can extend to anything from a character, an ideology, or even a quote. The effect is so strong that even a small sentence is enough to trigger certain feelings in your brain. So if I told you, “I want to play a game,” there is a high chance that your mind read that in a low and sinister voice. There is even a very good chance that once you saw that line, you read it out loud with the best Jigsaw impersonation you could muster. (Don’t lie, I know you did.)



Photo credit: Lionsgate

That one line is enough to elicit feelings of disgust, pleasure, or more commonly, the odd combination of both. The *Saw* franchise has delighted and emotionally scarred millions of people around the globe, with its elaborate death games and enough twists to make even M. Night Shyamalan blush. The running plot within that universe feels like an exercise in one-upmanship where each subsequent film tries to out-convolute its predecessor. Almost like an improv sketch where you have to “yes, and...” the previous story while the audience throws out some of their most ridiculous suggestions. This is the *Saw* we love to hate (or hate to love depending on your disposition), so watching its inevitable reboot through *Spiral: From the Book of Saw* has been more painful than any torture featured in the franchise to date.

This isn’t the first time this property has attempted a reboot and failed. Some of you may recall 2017’s offering to the saga, *Jigsaw*, that in retrospect is made criminally underappreciated when compared to its latest addition. That film suffered many of the same problems we see in *Spiral* except the only thing it did correctly was continuing the ideology set forth by its creator. This series has continued to be more and more police-heavy, almost exclusively following the storyline of the officers and agents trying to hunt down Jigsaw and his apprentices rather than focusing on the people. This time around, it’s all about the cops and the corruption rampant in their department. The killer, who is so poorly

written that they essentially out themselves very early in the film, has a vendetta against corrupt cops. Then again, who doesn't? The only difference being that we rather see them brought to justice instead of gored.



Photo credit: Lionsgate

Going into this, there was no doubt that there would be bloodbaths and dismemberment galore; that's not the problem. The issue arises when the methods of killing are so straightforward that the creativity that once morbidly entertained us turns to a big, bloody bore. The traps are so uninspired that they don't even offer the chance for the victims to escape. This shift in the original Jigsaw's operating procedure is one of the many things that fall victim to *Spiral's* attempt at social commentary and greater social relevance. It tries so desperately to be part of a bigger conversation like *The Purge* but ends up falling so short that it's more in league with the likes of *The Human Centipede*, only nowhere near as novel. Maybe that's what happens when you have a story led by 2 black men and centered around police corruption, but don't have any people of color writing or directing it.

We have arrived to the piece-de-resistance, seeing Chris Rock in a serious role. Before we get to him, let's acknowledge that everyone else did a good job in their thinly developed roles. Samuel L. Jackson manages to be the obvious stand-out, but also woefully underutilized because of it. Rock is the wrong choice to lead a story that doesn't have a single crumb of comedy in it. His exaggerated reactions and the way he is always yelling one-liners like he's performing at a retirement home, takes you out of the film and makes the character unbelievable in an already outrageous film. With both Rock and Jackson in *Spiral*, it just feels like a missed opportunity not to somehow feature the natural strengths of the actors by incorporating more comedy into the mix, even if it means altering the tone of the franchise. At least that way, there would be justification for a remake and we'd witness a glimmer of originality in this sepia sequel world.

"Spiral: From the Book of Saw" in theaters May 14th. Featuring Chris Rock, Samuel L. Jackson, Max Minghella, Marisol Nichols, Dan Petronijevic, and Richard Zeppieri. Directed by Darren Lynn Bousman. Written by Josh Stolberg and Pete Goldfinger. Rated "R"



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By [JON ESPINO](#) [18]
Film & Video Game Critic
HollywoodChicago.com
jon@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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