

Movie Review: 'The Mist'

by David_Elliott

Stephen King's "The Mist" poses no threat to John Carpenter's "The Fog." Conceptually, it nuzzles "Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster," though it's a lot less fun.

'THE MIST' - Laurie Holden, Thomas Jane and Nathan Gamble star in Frank Darabont's adaptation of Stephen King's 'The Mist.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ronn Schmidt. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Back in 1994, a King story was the basis of "The Shawshank Redemption," a fine prison film that made director Frank Darabont's reputation and is an enduring cult hit (notably on video). But soon Darabont became even more long-winded with another, more inane King adaptation, "The Green Mile."

You might say he's gone from a solid to a liquid to a gas: "The Mist." Never explained, though maybe due to a grotesquely misguided government experiment, it suddenly blankets much of the East Coast. Residents of a Maine town hide out at the Food House market, where plate glass and firewood lighters provide their main

defense.

As panic builds, vile tentacles appear from the mist, and giant insects and spiders who fly cast poisonous filaments on screaming people. Everyone gets to scream, and they keep screaming while filling out the note cards of King's agenda.

There are the young soldiers so paralyzed by the thought of impending duty in Iraq that they are useless in fighting the mist critters. Two of them simply commit suicide. So much for homeland security.

There is the mention of "corporate hand-outs" and the sinister military complex, rotten with secrets. There is a weird racial twist, with a haughty lawyer played by Andre Braugher. He looks much like Justice Clarence Thomas and has the judge's infamous chip on his shoulder, furious to believe that scared white people may be conning him.

Worst of all is end-time "religion," depicted as a witchy spew of sadistic Bible-spouting by Marcia Gay Harden. She gets high on impending doom and is in everyone's face before the bugs. Her overdue reward makes audience members whoop as if their prayers were answered.

Incarnating humanity are the usual King yokels and wise-offs, plus Toby Jones (Capote in "Infamous") as a smart store manager and regular guy hero David (Thomas Jane). His adorable son is the plot's Universal Child - the other kids don't count - and the boy keeps crying, pitifully asking his dad, "Don't let the monsters get me."

That isn't primal drama; it's primeval ugliness, made worse by modern effects long on gore. King clearly hates the tide of religious fundamentalism in America, but his brazen caricature of it and everything else shows his fundamentalism as a huckster of horrors (laugh, cringe, scream).

After enough time to make this spooker seem like a bug-crazed "Titanic," there is a sub-"Twilight Zone" finish so sunken in nihilism that you might crawl from the theater. The bugs, wisely, have already left.

A Dimension Films release. Director: Frank Darabont. Writers: Frank Darabont, Stephen King. Cast: Thomas Jane, Marcia Gay Harden, Laurie Holden, Andre Braugher, Toby Jones, Frances Sternhagen. Running time: 2 hours. Rated R. 0 stars.

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