

## 'The Boogeyman' checks all the boxes

Written by By James Jay Edwards For the Sun  
Friday, 09 June 2023 06:02

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Rating: <<<<

out of <<<<<<

Running Time:  
98 minutes

**This feature from 20th Century Studios opens in theaters everywhere on Friday, June 2.**

Director Rob Savage used his pandemic lockdown time to make a name for himself in the horror movie world with his micro-budget features *Host* (about a Zoom-séance) and *Dashcam* (about a live-streamed zombie breakout). And his efforts have paid off, as he is now at the helm of the newest adaptation from legendary literary horror maestro Stephen King, *The Boogeyman*.

*The Boogeyman* is about a pair of sisters named Sadie and Sawyer Harper (Sophie Thatcher from *Yellowjackets* and Vivien Lyra Blair from *Obi-Wan Kenobi*) who, along with their psychiatrist father, Will (Chris Messina from

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### *Devil*

), are working through their grief over the untimely death of their mother. When a strange man named Lester Billings (David Dastmalchain from

### *Dune*

) shows up at Will's office without an appointment, Will reluctantly agrees to see him – and is told a story about a strange presence that took the lives of all three of his new patient's children. Even worse, the presence seems to have attached itself to Will's family, now going after Sadie and Sawyer.

Based upon the short story of the same name that was included in King's 1978 *Night Shift* collection, the script for *The Boogeyman* was written by Mark Heyman (

### *Black Swan*

) from a screen story by Scott Beck and Bryan Woods (the duo who wrote

### *A Quiet Place*

). Those familiar with the original short story will notice that this adaptation is more of an "inspired by" work than a "based upon" one. The original tale includes only the office visit, while this movie moves well beyond that, using the concept as a springboard to craft an entirely unique story.

The screenplay deftly explores the effects of grief on the human condition, showing how it causes people to be vulnerable while simultaneously making them stronger. It's a subtle and powerful message, aided by layered and nuanced performances from Thatcher and Blair as the young daughters struggling with the loss of their mother while having to deal with an entity that is trying to exploit their fears.

The idea of *The Boogeyman* itself is paramount to the separation between Will and his daughters. The "monster in the closet" is very real to youngest daughter Sawyer, yet Will believes it is all in her head. Teenage daughter Sadie is somewhat on the fence, stuck between the practicality of adulthood and the nightmarish superstition of childhood.

Dealing with the monster is only half of the challenge for Sawyer. Convincing the world that it's real is a more daunting task.

However, despite the psychological thesis, *The Boogeyman* is still very much a horror movie, and that's where Savage excels. Although the budget for

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is much bigger than those of Savage's previous movies, the filmmaker still uses economy and a less-is-more aesthetic to make his point.

Particularly effective is Savage's use of light and darkness to obscure and slowly reveal The Boogeyman's threat. The Boogeyman itself can only come out in the dark, and along with cinematographer Eli Born (*Super Dark Times*, *Hellraiser*), Savage utilizes everything and anything that can provide illumination to ramp up the fear. Everything from Christmas lights to a video game screen — even a luminescent ball that Sawyer sleeps with to ward off night terrors — are used to surround The Boogeyman with palpable suspense, both protecting the girls from the creature while also showing them exactly, in little bits and pieces, what they need to be afraid of.

For better or worse, *The Boogeyman* checks all the boxes that a horror movie should. It hits some familiar tropes of the genre, but also manages to pack in a few surprises. And in some places, it manages to inspire some genuine terror. And, most importantly, the scares are not cheap.

With *The Boogeyman*, Savage proves that he doesn't need the screen-horror gimmick of his earlier films to make an effective movie. He can tell a story just as well with traditional filmmaking techniques as he can with experimental ones. And audiences get a Stephen King adaptation that captures the essence of the source material while profoundly expanding upon it.

*The Boogeyman* is a win-win.

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