

Fear at its most extreme



By [Daniel Dercksen](#)

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When a film is called *The Possession* and it begins with an ominous soundtrack and a warning that "the following is based on true events", suspending disbelief is optional. If the titles reveal that it is produced by horror maestro Sam Raimi, who changed the face of horror with *The Evil Dead*, and made by Ghost House Pictures, you are pretty much unnerved before paranormal events arise.

You have to have a strong constitution to watch *The Possession* without starting to feel suspiciously fearful of the unleashing of an ancient evil into our 21st-century world.

Chronicling the shocking experience of one family over 29 days, after they acquire a mysterious antique container and unsuspectingly let escape an insatiable demonic force that has been lying in wait to take full possession of a human soul, *The Possession* is not a comedy, parody or tries to hide its true intentions in any way, form or shape: it aims to scare the living daylights out of its audience and succeeds admirably!





The mind starts playing tricks

Although we realise that an event in a story is a constructed reality (even if it is based on fact), if this altered fictional reality is based on a factual actuality, the mind starts playing tricks and the imagination soars. To make matters worse, how we view films of a specific genre is further amplified by a loaded history.

From an innocent young girl who turns nasty in *The Exorcist* to a demon child who wants to rule the world in *The Omen*, to possessed nuns in *The Devils* and demonic possession in films like *The Devil Inside*, demons and their destructive malevolence have been popular in cinemas ever since. Throughout history, one of the darkest and most relentlessly persistent of human fears has been that of possession - the blood-curdling idea that your body and mind could be taken over by a hungry, inhuman force with a sinister will of its own.

A malicious spirit wandering in limbo

What makes *The Possession* unique is that it deals a demon called the Dibbuk. Written about in Jewish folklore, one type of Dibbuk (which literally means "an attachment") is said to be a malicious spirit wandering in limbo, which survives by fusing itself to a living person and inhabiting his very flesh. To keep their harrowing power at bay, carpenters built special arks or boxes to trap the Dibbuks - and the incomprehensible evil they represented - for all time.

The Possession is a well-crafted horror film featuring some great performances from Kyra Sedgwick and Jeffrey Dean Morgan as the concerned parent, with Natasha Calis drawing us into the raw experience of someone losing her mind to a demon.

Danish director Ole Bornedal keeps the tension tight as he turns Juliet Snowden and Stiles White's screenplay into blood-curdling action. Bornedal imaginatively and spectacularly explores his subject matter to the extreme, allowing for quiet, intimate scenes to heighten the suspense.

The Possession is one of those horror films (and psychological mindbenders) that poses a triple threat: it will freak you out, creep you out, and guarantees to blow your mind. There is some really terrifying imagery that is not for the fainthearted and will possess your dreams, particularly a disturbing scene in which the girl is bothered by a tickle in her throat and examines the cause of the irritation in a mirror. And, if you have any fear of flying insects, be warned, you phobia will explode.

The Possession seriously aims to remain true its genre and does not fool around. This is one outing to the cinema you should not do solo, gather a few friends and explore fear at its most extreme.

Behind the scenes

The film's climactic exorcism scene was shot at a particularly haunting location: the abandoned Riverview Mental Institution, the dilapidated buildings of which - once rife with paranoia, fear and grim treatments - still stand in Coquitiam, British Columbia. Built in 1913 and closed 70 years later, the buildings left behind are renowned for their instantly chilling atmosphere.

"Riverview has its own history of odd occurrences," noted location manager Terry Mackay. "There's a feeling inside that is otherworldly and because it's been vacant for so long, you have the sense of spirits or some kind of presence always there. I think it heightened all of our senses to film in there."

Cast and crew were on edge on this set, with some even refusing to enter rooms that seemed to be especially cold or oddly forbidding, but for screenwriters Julia Snowden and Stiles White nothing could have been more thrilling than to see such an organically scary place become home to their high-tension scene.

"There was a double eeriness to shooting in a location that people already say is haunted," mused White. "There were multiple layers of horror and weirdness. Along with the screaming and flashing lights of the scene, I have to admit, after watching the day of shooting, I had trouble getting to sleep that night."

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