

Supernatural, Your Teen, and You

Parenting Seminar

January 27, 2007

Jeremy Spence-Director of Student Ministries First Baptist Church

Activity to get your mind working:

Image one:

Image two:

Image three:

Image four:

Bonus image:

Question we are answering today:

Why host a parent seminar concerning the **supernatural?**

1. To **create** a strong front between parents and the CREW.
 - a. **Ecclesiastes 4.9-12**
2. Help you as parents/grandparents effectively fulfill your God given **role**.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 6.6-9**
3. Learn what the Bible says concerning the **supernatural**.
4. Challenge your in your **walk** with the **Lord**.

Couple Things to keep in mind:

Today will be the **beginning** of you process to understand this material.

You will **learn** more than you will be able to put into practice at one time.

I am not an **expert** by any means just a fellow **learner**.

We are in this thing **together**. I need you and you need me.

What you hear may **scare** you, **confuse** you, and possibly **upset** you.

This promises to be an **exciting** time to learn about God, His Word, you and others.

Let's start this journey.

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Worldviews

Definition of Worldview:

Webster's: **A comprehensive, especially person, philosophy or conception of the world and of human life.**

In human terms: **The basis for which we as humans understand the world around us.**

A worldview is the lenses we see the world through.

Facts about Worldviews:

Worldviews are **caught** not just **taught**.

All **decisions** come from your worldview, whether you realize it or not.

Your teen will **develop** his/her worldview by the time they are **twenty years old**.

One of your jobs's as a parent/grandparent is to help **nudge** them along in their spiritual journey.

Being a **Christian** no longer makes a difference in the way we act. We must have a **Biblical** view of the world.

Four Major Worldviews

Humanistic/Naturalism:

- This **denies** any supernatural or spirit world.
- Realm of **science**.
- Reality is based on the **physical**.
- The motto becomes: Live for **yourself**.
- **Pleasure** is the key.
- View that does not take into account **God**.
- There is no **meaning** in life.

Transcendental/Spiritualistic:

- The only reality in life is strictly **spiritual**
- We **become** our own god.
- **Reincarnation** becomes the key.
- The whole earth is **connected** and we are all **equal**
- Good and evil are **one** and the **same**.
- All **religions** and philosophies must be **combined** into one.

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Theistic Worldview:

- An **ultimate God** does exist.
- Man is a combination of both **physical** and **spiritual**
- God is the **creator**.
- There is an idea of **eternal judgment**.
- God uses many **different** ways to communicate to mankind.
- Many different **religions** can have this view.

Biblical Worldview:

- God as found in the **Bible** is the creator.
- God is **Triune** in nature. Doctrine of the Trinity.
- **Christ** is the Son of God.
- God is **involved** in the affairs of mankind.
- Sin corrupted the **physical** and **spiritual** realms.
- All things will be **restored** one day.
- The Bible is the ultimate **authority**.

Percentage of teens with a biblical worldview=**5-10%**

Percentage of adults with a biblical worldview=**35%**

We as Christians, and you as parents, are in a **critical** time in passing on our faith to the next generation.

The Bible, Supernatural and Spiritual Warfare

Passages concerning spiritual warfare

- **Genesis 3**-the war started in the Garden of Eden.
- **Ephesians 6.10-20**: The tools for war.
- **James 4**
- Almost every book of the New Testament mentions/alludes to the **supernatural/spiritual war** we are in. (The exception is 3 John, Philemon, and Titus)
- Satan and/or evil spirits I used **328 times** in the New Testament
- The life of Christ shows that **Satan** is at war with us.

The three areas we fight the war

1. From **within** and the concept of the “flesh”. Galatians 5
2. From **without** and battle with the world. Ephesians 2.1-3
3. From **above** and the battle with Satan. Ephesians 6

Our ultimate **enemy** is Satan.

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Characteristics of Satan

- Is an **angel of light**. 2 Corinthians 11.14
- **Rebelled** against God and thrown out of Heaven. A possible allusion in Bible but the Bible does not reveal the exact details.
- **Star** of morning. Isaiah 14.12
- God of this **world**. 2 Corinthians 4.4
- Murderer, **father of lies**, deceiver and no truth in him at all. John 8.44
- Comes to steal, kill and **destroy**. John 10.10
- Ready to **pounce** on us. 1 Peter 5.8
- Has been **defeated** by the work of Christ on the cross. 1 Corinthians 15.55-57
- Is not **omnipotent, omniscient** or **omnipresent**. He is a created being
- Asks **permission** from God to do certain things. Book of Job
- Must **flee** when we **resist** him. James 4.7
- **Greater** is God in us than Satan. 1 John 4.4
- Final **defeat** is yet to come. Revelation

Two final points:

Demons can fully control an **unbeliever**, see the Gospels for prove, but it seems according to the Bible that true Christians cannot be controlled. However, Christians can still be **influenced** by Satan and his demons.

God still holds us humans **responsible** for what we do even if we have been tempted.
Genesis 3

According to Bible we are not allowed to say “the Devil made me do it.”

Teens and the Supernatural

Supernatural=**anything that is beyond our physical senses and not able to be proven by what we see. It is beyond this world. Anything to do with the spiritual world.**

Things included in the supernatural: **Angels, demons, Holy Spirit, God, miracles, psychic, paranormal, occult, ghost, witches, spells, etc.**

The encouraging news about teens is that around **73%** of them affirm the existence of the supernatural world. Teens at First Baptist=**45% for sure; 41% Not Sure**

This means we have a wonderful **opportunity** to help our teens think Biblically.

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The downside is teens in general are not sure **exactly** what elements fit in the supernatural category. (The following is for FBC students only, not national) We are consistent with those findings.)

<u>73%</u> -Angels	<u>86%</u> -Demons
<u>36%</u> -Horoscopes	<u>50%</u> -psychics
<u>73%</u> -Talking with the dead	<u>32%</u> -Horoscopes
<u>9%</u> -Youth Group	<u>64%</u> -UFO
<u>77%</u> -Witchcraft/Sorcery	<u>41%</u> -Harry Potter
<u>77%</u> -Ouija Boards	<u>10%</u> -Other (ghosts, vampires)

I believe if we do not inform our teens as to exactly what is the supernatural, they could **unknowingly** be influenced by Satan and his demons.

The following percent of FBC students have participated in the following activities in the past three months:

82%-seen a movie or TV show with a supernatural theme in it.
10%-Been with a friend who engaged in psychic or witchcraft activities.
45%-Read their horoscopes.
41%-Read a book with a supernatural theme in it.

The past six months (the following is just changes from three months):

86%-movie or TV
14%-Friend engaged in psychic activities...
50%- horoscopes

The past twelve months (the following numbers are only if they changed from six months):

23%-Friend who engaged in psychic activities
55%-horoscope

When asked about their supernatural activities our teens have participated in, this is how they responded:

10%-Ouija Board
27%-Book about witchcraft and/or Wicca
5%-Participated in a Séance
10%-Tried to cast a spell or curse (one person mentioned they did as a joke)
10%-Played a game with witchcraft or sorcery as its theme
18%-Participated in any witchcraft activities

Our students are **below** the national average to right at average with regards to participating in supernatural activities.

Now for the **bad news**.

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Ranking of influence concerning Supernatural

1. Media
2. The Bible
3. Not Sure
4. Friends/Peers
5. Caring Adults besides mom and dad
6. Parents
7. Other

Shows and movies our teens are watching:

Illusionist; Heroes; Charmed; Skeleton Key; Chris Angel; Eragon; That's So Raven; Ghost Whisper; Smallville; Supernatural; Harry Potter; Signs; Stay Alive; Wrong Turn; Lord of the Rings Trilogy; Texas Chain Massacre; Saw; Horror Movies

These are what we are allowing to teach our teens about the supernatural.

Themes found in Harry Potter

100% of our teens know about Harry Potter. 73% feel as if Harry Potter is just harmless fiction.

Psychic abilities including palm reading, fortune telling, reading tea leaves, crystal ball, astrology and the like are all found in Harry Potter.

The good news is that Harry Potter does not put much faith in any of these throughout the books. The class where these are taught is portrayed in a "lower" light than others.

The Lord is very serious with regards to sorcery, Spiritist, mediums and the like.

- Exodus 22.18
- Leviticus 19.26,31; 20.21
- Deuteronomy 18.9-13

Witches and Wizards are the main characters in Harry Potter.

Around 75% of our teens believe witches and wizards do not exist or they are unsure of it. The problem with this is in reality they do exist.

The Bible shows us that as well as real life. (1 Samuel 28 and Galatians 5.20)

Witchcraft and Wicca, the religion of devout witches and wizards, is on the rise in America.

Ghosts

The majority of our teens believe that Ghosts exist. Harry Potter shows this as well.

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Some characteristics of Ghosts: **Haunt people, are dead people that are back, friendly; help out the students at Hogwarts.**

Why Ghosts **do not** exist:

- **Hebrews 9.27**
- **Luke 16.19-31**

So what are they if not ghosts? They are **demons**. The Bible is clear that we die once and that is it. We don't come back and haunt people we are put in a place awaiting judgment.

This is a prime **example** of the **deceiving** ways of Satan and his demons.

Some **good themes** within Harry Potter:

We have the story of **the temptation and spiritual warfare** battle in the opening pages of book one.

Lord Voldemort, the evil wizard, is not able to **triumph**.

We see the **schemes** of Satan personified in Lord Voldemort through the whole series.

Love overcomes evil and saves people. Definitely the story of Christ.

It is a story of **true friendships** between Ron, Hermione, and Harry.

The last book, *Half Blood Prince*, talks about we only **fear** what we don't know. The perfect love of God casts out all fears (1 John 4.18).

Other Supernatural Items

The Ouija Board:

For most teens this is a **harmless** activity.

In actuality what one is doing when they participate is opening themselves up to demonic **influences**.

The Bible teaches to avoid **every** kind of **evil**. 1 Thessalonians 5.22

The Ouija Board:

For most teens this is a **harmless** activity.

In actuality what one is doing when they participate is opening themselves up to demonic **influences**.

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How Do I know if my teen is involved, or at risk?

Below are general things to keep in mind to help you know what is going on. The list is not exhaustive but some things to keep an eye out for if you are concern about your teen being involved in supernatural activities.

- Core group of **friends** change suddenly.
- **Change** in habits and normal routine.
- Notice they seem to be spending more time **alone** than usual.
- **Outcast** in their social life.
- Preference of **music** changes.

Practical things you can do to help your teen:

- Encourage **participation** in church and CREW.
- Teach them the Philippians 4.8 **principle** and talk about it.
- Help them to make their **faith** their **own**.
- **Discuss** themes they are watching and reading.
- **Spend** time with your teen.
- Stay **involved** in their life.
- **Know** who their friends are.
- Pray for them **daily**.
- Teach them to test all spirits. 1 John 4.1-6

Ephesians 6.10-20

- We have the **weapons and gear** needed to win the battle. However, we must put it on.
- We must know the **Bible**. This is how Jesus fought Satan.
- We **need** others to help us in the battle. No lone rangers.

Loving your Teen

- Every teen and person desires to be loved in a **meaningful way**.
- Learn to speak your teen's love language.
 - **Words of Affirmation**
 - **Quality Time**
 - **Gifts**
 - **Acts of Service**
 - **Physical Touch**

When you learn to love you teenager in a meaningful way to them things happen.

Remember that you **can** and **will** make a difference in their life.

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Resources

www.pluggedinonline.com Great tool to learn what students are watching and the content in the shows. Gives you discussion questions to help you talk with your child about things.

www.cpyu.org This site is all about parent's learning about the culture of your child. This is a great organization with regards of getting information that may be useful to you. *The Five Love Languages*-I believe this book will change the way you relate to your teen, spouse, and anyone you come into contact with. It made me think through my relationships.

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis. A fictional story portraying letters from a demon and his uncle.

The Handbook on Spiritual Warfare by Dr Ed Murphy. This is a wonderful and complete look at spiritual warfare, the Bible and Christians.

I Want to Talk to my teen about Movies by Walt Mueller. Good book on learning how to discuss the influence of media on your teen and how to develop a Biblical worldview.

A Parent's Guide to Spiritual Warfare by Leslie Montgomery This is a book for parents by a parent and lets you into some of the struggles one mother had with raising her children with regards to spiritual warfare.

Any book in my library is available to borrow as long as you bring it back. I own a wide assortment of topics, books, and they are to be used by you. This is my way of trying to help you be able to effectively fulfill God given role as a parent.

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Saw

ONLINE EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS FILM FEATURES GRAPHIC VIOLENCE. THIS REVIEW REFERENCES THAT CONTENT AND IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN.

Two men wake up chained to the rusty bathroom pipes of a skuzzy underground chamber. Between them lies a man faced down in a pool of blood—with a revolver and a tape recorder in his hands. As they listen to the tapes placed in each of their pockets, they discover they're the next victims of a psychopath. One of them, Dr. Lawrence Gordon, is told to kill the other man (Adam) within eight hours. If he doesn't, his wife and daughter will die.

Lawrence and Adam are left to gradually uncover inconspicuous clues and strange items—including a single bullet and two saws too weak to cut through metal but strong enough to pierce flesh. As Lawrence recollects his involvement with detectives on a case a few months earlier, he pinpoints the mastermind behind this cruel "game": a serial kidnapper named Jigsaw. But why has he been targeted? And what does Adam have to do with anything? More importantly, how far will each man go to survive?

POSITIVE ELEMENTS

In a twisted sort of way, the movie highlights living gratefully. The mentally deranged villain is obsessed with teaching people to appreciate life, to the point that he places them in life-or-death situations that, should they survive, will teach them to be thankful for their next breath. (Only one person trapped by Jigsaw has survived, though—a statistic which seems to undermine the "positive" lesson supposedly intended.)

Family is of the utmost importance to Lawrence. Despite his workaholic nature and frequent absence when his wife and daughter need him most, the doctor desperately wants to be reunited with them. In their search for escape, Adam and Lawrence are forced to trust and rely upon each other.

SEXUAL CONTENT

Adam sarcastically says his chained condition is the "most fun I've had without lubricant." A detective makes a remark about a pedophile dentist. Lawrence is having an affair with one of his medical students. In a flashback she's seen taking off her shirt (cleavage is shown before he stops her). Other affairs are insinuated. Adam crudely talks about wealthy men's sexual involvement with their secretaries, and later makes an obscene joke about the doctor's sex life.

VIOLENT CONTENT

The sheer premise of this movie invites buckets of blood, guts and gore—and *Saw* certainly lives up to expectations. From the first scene to the last, blood flows, flies, spews, spatters, gushes and gurgles. The blood-covered body lying between Lawrence and Adam is a staple of virtually every "chamber" scene (a location that dominates the movie's screen time).

Jigsaw's torturous antics are depicted case by case in full visual detail and repeated several times via flashbacks. A man dies suspended in mid-air by a web of barbed wire cutting deeply

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into his flesh. The charred face of a victim who ended up setting himself on fire is shown up close. A woman whose jaw is wired to explode retrieves a key from the stomach of a living (drugged-up) man. After stabbing him repeatedly, she hoists his innards in the air.

During a face-to-face confrontation between detectives and the alleged mastermind, a torture machine comes close to drilling through a victim's skull. The showdown ends with one officer getting slit in the throat and his partner getting shot repeatedly. (Again, the camera lingers on close-ups of the gore.) Lawrence and Adam are both jolted harshly with electricity administered through their chains. As Lawrence's wife attempts to flee her kidnapper, she stabs him in the leg. The initial cuts of a ghastly amputation appear in detail. And in what may be the film's most gruesome scene, a man's head is pounded with a slab of concrete. Gun battles end with casualties. Need I continue?

CRUDE OR PROFANE LANGUAGE

More than 25 f-words (including ones used in sexual contexts and ones linked to "mother"). Additionally, a dozen-plus s-words appear in various forms. Jesus' and God's names are abused.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONTENT

Jigsaw's only surviving victim, Amanda, admits to being a drug addict (no drug use is shown). Despite her torture experience (which includes killing a man who's high on heroin), she claims Jigsaw helped her, and we're left to draw the conclusion that she is now drug-free and credits him with her recovery. As they break from their investigation, several officers talk about going to drink beer. Adam is willing to risk everything for a cigarette left in a box by Jigsaw. He later smokes one.

OTHER NEGATIVE ELEMENTS

Though not as gory as the rest of the movie's violent scenes, the kidnapping of Lawrence's family is just as intense, particularly because it involves his young daughter. Her screams of "Why?" combined with her mother's desperate pleas to their cold-hearted kidnapper make for a disturbing sequence.

CONCLUSION

Rookie director James Wan must have been trying to recreate the mesmerizing yet desensitizing effect TV's *CSI* franchise has had on audiences. In warped fashion, *Saw*'s goriest scenes—from mutilations to amputations—become freeze-frame shots, as if to intimate that treating the subject matter like a crime-scene investigation somehow excuses over-the-top violence and gore. For Wan, detective work as a plot point must mean nothing more than an opportunity to display graphic, up-close depictions of unthinkable cruelty—with lots of obscene language added for full effect.

While this *Se7en* wannabe has a few clever moments of tension (e.g., using a camera's flash as the only light source during an intense hunt for an intruder), its shock factor is strictly based on the glorification of a psychopath's inhumane mind games. Touting torture as a treat becomes the heart of *Saw*—something that should automatically send most morally minded moviegoers running for the exits. And yet, sadly, it won't.

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In all honesty, *Saw*'s perverse pictures weren't the most disturbing things I saw while reviewing it. It was disconcerting enough to sit in a theater full of mothers with their 8-year-old boys in tow and groups of 12-year-old girls chaperoned by solitary adults. It was nearly intolerable to witness them—kids and adults—*applauding* when a man onscreen got his brains bashed in. And *laughing* when Lawrence sobbed helplessly on the cell phone while his wife and daughter struggled at gunpoint with their kidnapper.

So in the end, *Saw* may say even more about the people who see it than it does about the people who created it.

Saw II

ONLINE EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS FILM FEATURES GRAPHIC VIOLENCE. THIS REVIEW REFERENCES THAT CONTENT AND IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN.

Less than a year after its first installment, the *Saw* “franchise” is back to torture moviegoers. It was a no-brainer for Hollywood. What else is there to do when a movie made for little more than \$1 million earns \$55 million in the U.S. and another \$47 million overseas?

This time psychopath Jigsaw has a new batch of fresh, unsuspecting victims to teach a twisted lesson. Among them are detective Eric Matthews and his teenage son, Daniel. After another Jigsaw crime scene involves a strange warning to Eric, the detective and his team manage to track down the criminal. But it's too late; Jigsaw has already set a booby trap for a group that includes Daniel. After waking up in a strange chamber, he and the others receive cryptic instructions to their “game”: Find an antidote that will save them from the lethal nerve gas that's already been pumped into their systems while they were asleep.

To do so, they must discover what they all have in common, which will supposedly reveal the combination to a safe containing an exit key. But when Xavier, a self-centered drug dealer willing to trample over anyone, becomes a threat to the entire group, the game turns into a kill-or-be-killed free-for-all. To make things a little trickier, they only have two hours before the gas does the job for them. Meanwhile, as they search for the cure (and a way out), Jigsaw continues to play mind tricks on Eric.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS

Despite his numerous failings as a father, Eric loves Daniel and risks his life to save him. Other police officers show concern for Eric. During an intense scene, Daniel wants to help Amanda, a veteran of the deranged architect's games, out of a trap. He also tries to encourage another young woman. A few people suggest working together as a team to find a way to survive.

Once again, Jigsaw has the same purpose behind his madness: To get his victims to appreciate what they have. From his warped viewpoint, his traps offer individuals a chance to redeem themselves. By forcing them into life-or-death situations, “You feel alive ... that's the point,” he explains. (What he never mentions, however, is that few subjects seem to survive these object lessons—which, in any sane person's mind, defeats the purpose.)

SPIRITUAL CONTENT

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Jigsaw reminds a victim that “once you’re in hell, only the devil can help you.” The point is furthered when, as the man burns to death, we see a painted picture of the devil among the flames.

SEXUAL CONTENT

Xavier makes a crude comment about a woman being promiscuous. A young woman’s top shows cleavage throughout the movie. Other females’ tops are revealing. A man is seen wearing only briefs.

VIOLENT CONTENT

Gruesome. Gory. Gratuitous. After a man is shot through his eye, blood shoots across the room onto the rest of the group. And the blown-apart back of his head gets up-close screen time more than once. Xavier uses a knife to cut off a layer of flesh from the back his own neck; bloodied close-ups show the blade digging in. He also plunges a homemade mace into the back of a fellow victim’s head; it’s later ripped out by Amanda with full visual and sound effects.

A man’s face is bloodied after Jigsaw has somehow placed a key behind his eye. He’s unwilling to cut out his eye and, as a result, a nail-filled venus flytrap-type device snaps shut on his head creating a massive pool of blood. As the camera pans over every inch of his dead body, we’re given *CSI*-like snapshots of various grisly lacerations. Another apparatus breaks the legs of a policeman, and his screams are heard for an entire scene. SWAT team members nearly get electrocuted in a cage.

Yet another victim is locked in a furnace and slowly burned to death. While we see his legs on fire and (later) some singes on his head, equally as disturbing are the close-up shots of his convulsing body and his harrowing screams as others watch him die. Caught in a trap, a woman’s arms are virtually shredded by blades.

The film’s sick fascination with creative ways to suffer and die just goes on and on. Throats are sliced open. Necks are broken. Suicides are attempted. Men get punched, hit over the head with various objects, kicked in the face and tossed around until they’re bloodied beyond recognition. Influenced by the gas penetrating their lungs, several victims violently throw up and cough up blood. Rotting corpses and severed body parts are shown.

Then, as *Saw II* concludes, *every single* torture scene it contains—and several from the original [Saw](#)—are replayed as plot elements are connected.

CRUDE OR PROFANE LANGUAGE

The f-word appears more than 80 times (often combined with “mother”), while the s-word gets used more than 30 times. God’s name is sullied half-a-dozen times, mostly with “d--n”; Jesus’ is abused twice. Around two-dozen other profanities are heard.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONTENT

Flashbacks show Amanda shooting up drugs and passed out under the influence. Three of the victims were once arrested for drug possession by Eric, who is later drugged by a masked

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assailant. A trap set for Xavier includes a pit full of IV needles, some of which end up sticking into Amanda. Eric smokes cigarettes. A joke is made about being drunk in college.

OTHER NEGATIVE ELEMENTS

Daniel lambastes his father, telling him he's a better cop than he is a dad. We learn that Eric is a crooked cop who has frequently planted evidence on suspects to convict them and, according to Jigsaw, has gunned down innocent victims.

CONCLUSION

It's hard to imagine topping the vile content of the original [Saw](#), in which blood gushed as freely as water over Niagara Falls. Yet somehow—*somehow!*—the makers of this entirely unnecessary sequel have managed to do it. Even mainstream critics seem befuddled. "This is entertainment?" asks the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* David Hiltbrand. *Newsweek's* John Anderson adds that *Saw II* "is so gratuitously, sadistically violent, and to such little end, that it finally falls over dead on the far side of obscene."

Indeed, how filmmakers can justify celebrating such an onslaught of gore and violence is fundamentally baffling. Equally so is the willingness of people to pay money to see it. And yet, given this movie's ending—and its boffo box-office earnings—it won't be long before *Saw III* cuts its way through theaters. It's as if Jigsaw himself were behind the lens and is, as he puts it, "testing the fabric of human nature."

Saw III

ONLINE EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS FILM FEATURES GRAPHIC VIOLENCE AND LEWD SEXUAL CONTENT. THIS REVIEW REFERENCES THAT CONTENT AND IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN.

So many people to torture, maim and kill. So little time. Jigsaw is on his deathbed in the third *Saw* movie. But he's determined to see his final "test" through to the end before he succumbs to the same fate he's insured for so many. So he arranges for Lynn, an ER trauma physician, to be abducted and brought to him.

This is Jigsaw we're talking about here, so everything has to be a life-and-death game. Lynn's "game" consists of her trying to keep the psychopath alive through a harrowing brain surgery. If she doesn't, the explosive collar that's been locked around her neck—which is connected to his heart-rate monitor—will go *bang*.

Meanwhile, Jeff, the subject of Jigsaw's final test, participates in a series of grotesque challenges in the dark reaches of the killer's cavernous, torture-chamber "facility." Why? According to Jigsaw, it's to give Jeff the opportunity to either get back at or forgive a series of individuals involved in his young son's accidental death (he's hit by a car) years earlier.

Jigsaw's apprentice, Amanda, oversees Jeff's misfortunes.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS

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Jigsaw puts a lot of emphasis on forgiveness. As he did in the first two movie installments ([Saw](#) and [Saw II](#)), he claims again here that the reason he tortures people and makes them face death is to teach them how to "live again." He insists he wants them to forgive those who have wronged them (including himself) in order to regain their joy for living.

It pains me to even write such words of praise in the context of a *Saw* review, and I'll take them all back in my "Conclusion." Besides, as noted in our review of *Saw II*, "What Jigsaw never mentions is that few subjects seem to survive these object lessons—which, in any sane person's mind, defeats the purpose." I'll add to that here that many of *Saw III*'s victims are ancillary to Jigsaw's main game. He merely—and callously—uses their deaths to facilitate Jeff's test.

In one of the games, a judge sacrifices his own life to try to save the life of a stranger. Before he dies he instructs Jeff, "Vengeance never solves anything. It only makes the pain greater." Whether it's because she desires to do so or she's afraid for her own life, Lynn does everything possible to administer medical attention to Jigsaw. Brief images allude to the fact that the police are doing their best to track down Jigsaw.

SPIRITUAL CONTENT

"You can sentence his soul to hell, or you can forgive," Jigsaw says to Jeff. And he calls the human body a "miraculous creation."

SEXUAL CONTENT

It's impossible to separate the sexual content from the violent content in *Saw III*. A nude woman is seen (from head to toe, front and back) hanging by her wrists in a walk-in freezer. While nothing about the abominable events that happen next is *sexual*, per se, the filmmakers' abuse of her in this way not only degrades and dehumanizes her, but also objectifies her in a horrifically elongated scene in which the camera keeps coming back for more.

Another woman wearing almost nothing except the instrument of torture she's connected to has her chest ripped open and splayed out by metal hooks. A man in the same condition is forced to rip thick metal rings out of various parts of his body.

A quick head shot reveals Lynn in bed with a man after cheating on her husband. (Jigsaw remarks upon her willingness to give herself away to strangers.)

VIOLENT CONTENT

Saw III opens with quick vignettes of two people dying due to Amanda's efforts to live up to Jigsaw's reputation. They have very little to do with the rest of the story, so it's almost as if the filmmakers are offering up tasty appetizers to perk up bloodthirsty moviegoers' palates.

And indeed, blood and gore, pain and death are worshiped here. Choruses of screams serve as the soundtrack. Limbs are severed. Bones are crushed. Bodies are hewn. Heads are blown apart. All the bloody results are shown with brutal clarity. Between flashbacks to previous torture scenes in the first two films and an obsessive dedication to delivering new material, it's a wonder the film didn't run three hours straight.

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The woman in the freezer dies as she's slowly encrusted with ice which forms from water that's sprayed onto her. A man nearly drowns in the "juice" generated by a machine pulverizing animal carcasses. Another's head is blasted half off with a shotgun. Acid eats into a police detective's hand when she's forced to fish a key out of it. Spread-eagled on a rack of sorts, Jeff's primary "opponent" in his game screams and writhes as his arms and legs and finally his head are slowly twisted off his body. Two women are shot. Both gush blood. A man's throat is ripped open with a circular saw. Another chops off his own appendages. Amanda suffocates a man with plastic. She and another victim battle it out with such implements of destruction as metal poles. She repeatedly stomps on the stump of his severed leg. Kidnappings and imprisonments include that of a young girl.

Operating on Jigsaw, Lynn cuts and then pulls back his scalp with a pair of pliers. Then she uses a power drill to puncture his skull. And finally a rotary saw to cut out a square. The camera never blinks. But Lynn has to—to keep the blood from blinding her. Jigsaw throws up and bleeds from his mouth during a long sequence in which he convulses and nearly dies

Mutilating herself, Amanda uses a large knife to cut long gashes into the inside of her thigh. Lynn shoots holes through a door while trying to kill her abductors.

If *Saw III* proves anything, then, it is that there is no end to creative and imaginative evil. And there is no end to the ways in which movies can show people being mangled, lacerated, dissected, brutalized ... and murdered.

CRUDE OR PROFANE LANGUAGE

Between 30 and 40 f-words are joined by a handful of s-words and an abuse of Christ's name. God's name is also interjected a half-dozen times. The most obscene, derogatory terms possible for women are hurled with aplomb.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONTENT

Lynn takes a prescription bottle out of her locker at the hospital. And Jigsaw reminds her later that she hasn't been able to cope with life without her antidepressants.

In a flashback, Jigsaw fakes his own death. To make the scene convincing, he injects himself with a drug he tells Amanda will slow his heart rate and relax his muscles.

CONCLUSION

Commingle the message of forgiveness with endless scenes of torture and death—in the way all of the *Saw* movies do—is at best schizophrenic, and at worst diabolical. Insisting that he wants to pass on to Amanda "the honor of continuing my life's work," Jigsaw self-righteously reprimands her for constructing games that are impossible (rather than just implausible) to win. After all, he reasons, he's been trying to help people all these years. She's been murdering them. "I don't condone murder," he intones. "I despise murderers."

Not that the script plays fair with how people react to his *life's work*, either. When Jeff is confronted with the woman in the freezer, for instance, his first instinct is to stand and lecture her about her not helping his son when he was hit by the car. That makes him a monster of the same

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hideous stripe as Jigsaw. It's a colossally inhuman response. Face-to-face with a woman in jeopardy of imminent death, he's concerned about getting in his two cents worth. Ugh.

From that point on, it's impossible to care much if this fictional beast of a man lives or dies—or even if he's destined to take over for Jigsaw in *Saw IV*. It's all irrelevant since now it's just monster vs. monster, winner kills all.

"Lies!" Amanda screams in the film's gruesome and grueling climax. "[Lynn] hasn't changed, because nobody f---ing changes. Nobody is reborn." These *Saw* movies certainly don't. And they certainly aren't.

Ugly Betty



DEC. 2006

Betty Suarez was hired for her looks, though one glance at the laughably un-chic Plain Jane and you'd swear her boss needed another round of Lasik surgery. The cosmetically challenged girl from a working-class Queens family sticks out like polka-dots on plaid in a fashion industry where appearance is everything. Yet amidst all the superficiality on ABC's hit dramedy, *Ugly Betty*, it's easy to see the title character's inner beauty. Her show, on the other hand, has serious blemishes.

Back to that "hired for her looks" thing. To everyone's astonishment, Betty (played brilliantly by America Ferrera) becomes assistant to Daniel Meade (Eric Mabius), the new editor of fashion bible *Mode*. It's a strategic move on the part of his father, *Mode*'s owner (Alan Dale), who wants to make sure his playboy son concentrates more on running the magazine than on seducing his new assistant. After a rough start, Daniel and Betty realize they face similar obstacles (namely a diva fashionista plotting to take over the Meade empire) and resolve to watch each other's backs.

Ugly Betty's soapy plot is to be expected, given that the show is adapted from a wildly successful Colombian *telenovela*. On the bright side, messages about being oneself trump keeping up with the latest trend. Likewise, the impossible standards of the fashion industry get exposed and belittled. That's great, especially for young, self-conscious girls taking mental notes of what's hot and what's not.

However, certain accessories in this show's moral wardrobe clash with those positive statements. Sexual jokes. Cleavage-baring outfits. Lingerie-clad models. Meanwhile, a gay assistant offers Betty's young, fashion-conscious nephew advice on being "different." The pilot episode found Daniel receiving oral sex from an assistant hidden under his desk. Viewers have also run into mild profanity, witnessed a couple making out and glimpsed scenes from the Suarez family's favorite *telenovela*, a rather risqué TV program.

That's a real shame, both because of the series' family-hour time slot (where it averages 15 million viewers per week) and its refreshing inclination toward Cinderella storytelling. As the 22-year-old Ferrera notes, "This show is not about being ugly at all. More than anything it's just about looking past what you see. Achieving that image is not all that we're on this planet to do." Indeed, beauty is highly overrated, as Proverbs 31:30, Matthew 23:27 and 1 Peter 3:3-4 attest. But such honorable themes get tripped up on their stroll down the runway.

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Ghost Whisperer



MARCH 2006

Melinda Gordon isn't easily scared. After all, she sees and talks to dead people. As a medium on CBS' *Ghost Whisperer*, she helps earthbound spirits make amends with the living. That involves helping ghosts "cross over into the light" and relaying messages from the afterlife to those grieving the loss of a loved one. The rest of her time is spent convincing the living that she isn't crazy.

Judging from its premise, you might expect the show to immerse itself in the macabre, à la NBC's *Medium*. But Jennifer Love Hewitt, who plays Melinda, says there's a concerted effort to refrain from doing so. "Because of the subject matter we're dealing with, we can't get too scary or else it starts to make fun of the idea of what this woman does and what her gift is. So it won't be jump-out-of-your-seat, horror-movie scary, but there will be some definite suspense."

Contrary to Hewitt's take, episodes start out pretty creepily with ghosts that appear ghoulish and even demonic. But in time we learn more about their stories. By the end of the hour, these fearsome figures have become as tame and friendly—both in appearance and demeanor—as Casper. As they make up for lost time and say their last goodbyes, there's not a dry eye in the place.

Ghost Whisperer's problem isn't its tear-jerking moments, quests for reparation or ghastly images—as weighty as all of that can get. Rather, it's the show's muddled concept of the afterlife, which includes constantly tweaked rules regarding what ghosts can and can't do. There's also no mention of heaven or hell. Blame co-executive producer James Van Praagh for this mishmash of the hereafter. A world-renowned psychic/medium and the show's main influencer, he preaches, "There are many paths to enlightenment. Religion is one of them. [The] paranormal is another one."

God clearly verifies the existence of the supernatural in His Word (1 Samuel 28; Mark 9:4). But the Lord is equally explicit in His warnings against tinkering with it (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Series creator John Gray isn't convinced, however, arguing that "there's just too much for us to know what's probably going on out there." As a result, Gray fashioned *Ghost Whisperer* so that believers and skeptics alike might be entertained by the notion of having a second, otherworldly chance at reconciliation. It's a nice sentiment, but chilling when stacked up against God's Word.

EPISODES REVIEWED:

Sept. 23, 30, Dec. 16, 2005; Jan. 6, 13, 2006

The Illusionist

When the teenage son of a carpenter with a gift for magic tricks falls for the daughter of a local duke, he is driven from the village to keep their cross-caste relationship from blooming. Flash forward 15 years to 1900 Vienna. The boy is now a popular stage illusionist known as Eisenheim. His mind-boggling routine draws the attention of Crown Prince Leopold. And when Leopold's fiancée volunteers at a performance to assist Eisenheim onstage, the illusionist is shocked to discover she is his long lost love, the Duchess Sophie. To spend more time with her, Eisenheim jumps at the opportunity to perform a private show at Leopold's castle.

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The arrogant Crown Prince is known to be violent with his women and appears to be using Sophie merely for political gain. Uhl, Vienna's chief inspector of police and a fan of magicians, warns Eisenheim not to cross Leopold. Heedless, the illusionist makes a fool of the prince in front of his friends and convinces Sophie to try to leave the man and come away with him. Leopold responds with a vengeance. Eisenheim challenges Uhl to stand up to Leopold in the name of justice, but Uhl knows to do so could cost him his life.

Eisenheim, distraught, takes matters into his own hands. He begins performing shows in which he appears to be communicating with the dead. And he uses his influence to turn his fans against the Crown Prince. What no one knows is whether Eisenheim now has real supernatural powers or if he's merely the best illusionist the city has ever seen.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS

The film hinges, in part, on whether Chief Inspector Uhl will take the risk of standing up against a corrupt authority or protect his own career interests and safety. [*Spoiler Warning*] Eventually, he follows the path of integrity. Eisenheim also takes great risks to help those he loves.

SPIRITUAL CONTENT

The central mystery is meant to revolve around whether Eisenheim is merely a talented illusionist or genuinely possesses supernatural powers, particularly the power to speak to the dead (who are produced upon his stage in the form of translucent holograms). His act is so successful that a local spiritual movement springs up, claiming Eisenheim's ability as evidence for the "immateriality of the soul." Eisenheim both proclaims and denies that he has supernatural powers. However, the film's final moments do indeed reveal the nature of his abilities, a revelation central to Leopold's skepticism, criminal activity and corruption.

SEXUAL CONTENT

Women bare cleavage in period costumes. There is some passionate kissing, and one brief sex scene between unmarried characters includes close-up (and therefore somewhat indistinct) images of intimate caressing and skin on skin. (Afterwards, he's seen shirtless, and the camera also catches her bare back.)

VIOLENT CONTENT

An onstage illusion includes the image of a woman being theatrically struck down by a sword, causing an empty robe to collapse in a heap. Leopold strikes Sophie across the face. The murder of one character by another with a sword figures prominently into the story. We don't witness the moment of attack, though we do later see a bloody neck wound on the body. A man kills himself by shooting himself in the head, resulting in a little blood briefly witnessed.

At one of Eisenheim's shows, the audience clashes with police. When he's a boy, Eisenheim is grabbed and pushed to the ground. Leopold pulls a pistol on Uhl. A police officer is bodily tossed out of theater and into the street.

CRUDE OR PROFANE LANGUAGE

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At worst, a possible exclamation of "d--n."

DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONTENT

Alcohol is consumed with meals. Crown Prince Leopold gets drunk on several occasions. A character is drugged.

CONCLUSION

Based on a short story by Steven Millhauser, *The Illusionist* is meant to be a moody little puzzle of a fairy tale. And director Neil Burger certainly assembled the right cast to pull it off (among them, Ed Norton, Paul Giamatti and Rufus Sewell). The period story is mysterious, tricky and potentially quite satisfying. But the final experience, though diverting, doesn't live up to its potential.

For one thing, Burger chooses to present the whole film in a replica of the hand-cranked autochrome process look of the early days of cinema. The fluttery, monochromatic, dark-at-the-edges technique creates an interesting effect evocative of the turn-of-the-century time period. But it also adds a distracting layer between the screen and the audience that kept me from fully immersing in the story. Similarly, the writing and sometimes plodding pace of the fable kept me at arm's length from the characters. In the end, the story feels as if it should have been much more engaging and satisfying than it actually is.

Additionally, and of spiritual note, Eisenheim's vague occult references (as part of this stage act) raise concerns, especially when he allows a movement to spring up in Vienna in support of the notion that he can summon the spirits of the dead. Even his offstage denials leave the question open. Whatever is revealed in the story's final moments (and I'll refrain from giving away the answer), viewers are asked to ponder the dark possibilities for the length of the film.

On the other hand, I applaud Burger for not resorting to overly graphic sex, violence and language in an attempt to amp the wattage. *The Illusionist's* stage is not *pristine* by any definition, but the filmmakers do seem to have embraced the illusionist's creed that what is not seen can often be more powerful than what is revealed in plain sight.