

"MY SOUL TO TAKE" (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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Some of the most prominent criticism of John Carpenter's recent return to feature filmmaking, *THE WARD*, has been that it's not exactly evident that Carpenter was behind the camera (I wouldn't know as I haven't seen it yet). With *MY SOUL TO TAKE*, the first film Wes Craven has both written and directed since 1994's *NEW NIGHTMARE*, however, there's no question the veteran filmmaker was the guiding force, as (for both better and worse) his sensibilities, interests and general personality are present throughout.

MY SOUL is the story of Bug (Max Thieriot) and the six kids he shares a birthday with in the town of Riverton, Massachusetts. The evening the seven were born, the Riverton Ripper, a vicious serial killer with multiple personalities (or multiple souls, as one character puts it) disappeared, vowing he'd return for "them," seemingly referring to his souls who'd been transposed into those brought into the world that night. Now, on their collective 16th birthday, the Ripper begins staging a comeback—only it isn't quite evident if it's him, or one of the adolescents who has taken on the more sinister side of his personalities.



It's possible the aforementioned gap in time since *NEW NIGHTMARE* is to blame, but the tone of Craven's latest is a bit difficult to settle into at first. It also doesn't help that the trailers and ads don't convey a good feel for the film. What it actually comes across like is part supernatural slasher, part coming-of-age tale and part snappy high-school flick—and surprisingly, it works. Bug and his peers—best friend Alex (John Magaro), popular crush Brittany (Paulina Olszynski), overbearing jock Brandon (Nick Lashaway), spiritual ginger Penelope (Zena Grey), the blind Jerome (Denzel Whitaker—what a name!), the first-to-go Jay (Jeremy Chu) and Bug's angry sister Fang (Emily Meade)—are often funny, non-eye-roll-inducing depictions of teens on the

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brink of adulthood (or so they think), and although their dialogue is often heavily stylized and maybe a bit too snarky and witty for naturalism's sake, it's amusing. The film is successful at being just as entertaining when it's not looking to scare you as when it is.

The humor infused into the darker proceedings of MY SOUL TO TAKE is one of the main signifiers that this is a Craven film, but the real indicator of his own soul are the themes and motifs he often calls upon: being young and sheltered (much as the director was in his childhood), the violent natures of suburbia and those who reside there and growing into adulthood without exactly understanding just who you are, or want to be. As the film looks to pose whether the actual Riverton Ripper has returned or one of the seven is embodying him (SPOILER ALERT), naturally, all signs point to protagonist Bug, who turns out to be the murderer's biological son. As his friends die around him, Bug often takes on aspects of their personalities, or repeats things they've said. On one level, it's a part of the eerie proceedings as he loses control of himself, but on another, Bug stands in for all the introverted and generally naive teens in the world who are thrown into mature situations by friends or family, plagued by their lack of confidence and overabundance of influences surrounding them.

While not overly gory, the murders in MY SOUL TO TAKE are fairly brutal (due to the ages of the victims, who, unlike other slasher casts, are at a relatively younger and more tender age, aren't oversexed and aren't completely obnoxious). Thus, they're often highly effective, particularly one set in the woods where almost nothing but dripping blood is shown, but is harrowing nonetheless.

This isn't to say that the movie is perfect, however. As you can glean from our recent [interview](#) with the filmmaker, Craven is quite a talker, and that aspect is heavily present in MY SOUL TO TAKE. Especially toward the end, his script is bogged down by heavy dialogue containing expository information that's repeated several times. It feels like an oversaturation of the movie's mythology—which, despite this repetition, you may never feel you 100 percent understand. There's also the sense of missing moments; beyond shots in the trailer that don't show up in the film, Jerome is seriously underdeveloped, and we don't get to know him nearly as well as the others. And while this may be nitpicking given that she's a terribly minor character, the actress who portrays Bug's biological mother in the opening minutes of the film is so incredibly flat, it's distracting. That, coupled with a few brief but still poor CGI choices on Craven's part (you'll understand when you see the baby hand) make for cringeworthy moments.

As for the 3-D...it's basically nonexistent. The conversion still results in a sharp and good-looking image (cinematographer Petra Korner gets great autumnal and picturesque shots of the New England settings)—which is to say it isn't murky or irritating like in CLASH OF THE

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TITANS. But still MY SOUL TO TAKE was never intended for 3-D to begin with, so while some added depth is visible, it doesn't make much of a difference and probably isn't worth your extra dollars if a 2-D showing is available.

MY SOUL TO TAKE will most likely not be considered among the best of Craven, but that doesn't stop it from being solid, fun and often charming (when blood isn't being shed, of course). Its flaws aren't hard to spot, but Craven's personal connection to the material is as evident as the fact that neither his talent nor imagination have left him, which definitely makes it worth giving the film a shot.



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