

Going Further

An Insidious: Out of the Further Review

By: Adam Dombrow

Ever since watching the first *Insidious* in theaters, I have been a massive fan. Sure, the series has had a few hiccups (I've still enjoyed each film, but I do feel like the previous installment *Insidious: The Red Door* was a little weak in terms of the scare factor), but for the most part I've always felt like the world-building has been *strong enough*, and the scares have been *creative enough* (out of necessity), to provide me with subsequent entertainment. That being said, upon hearing that there was going to be *another* entry already (I say already, but it's *already* been 3 years) I was a bit skeptical as to whether or not these were just becoming cash grabs.

I'm happy to report that those skepticisms were misplaced, and *Out of the Further* is not only a worthy entry to the franchise (more comparable to the original three than the previous two), but it might just be a total game changer for it as well!

Let's start by answering the question of whether or not *Out of the Further* is scary. Honestly, in my opinion, yes, but with the caveat being "for PG-13". This actually becomes a bit of a catch-22 not only for this entry, but for the *Insidious* franchise as a whole. I feel that the original *Insidious* can *at the very least* stand alongside series' original director James Wan's more acclaimed *Conjuring* entries in terms of scare factor, but the PG-13 rating does somewhat limit the possible intensity of the scares. This forces the directors/writers to be a little bit more creative in terms of what they show, and how they set up scares, though, and that has kind of strengthened the series in my opinion. I feel that *Out of the Further* director/writer Jacob Chase

was able to bring a lot of the scare building techniques he displayed in his previous feature, *Come Play*, and seamlessly integrate them here. For instance: where some directors would usually do one camera pan, or two, then do the jump scare, Chase is doing three, or sometimes none, and it creates this somewhat unpredictability factor that keeps this movie feeling fresh, which a franchise that is now six films deep desperately needs. There's some pretty gnarly *body horrorish* stuff too!

Chase owes *a lot* of the heavy lifting credit for the aforementioned praise to both cinematographer Dave Garbett and sound designer Bill R. Dean. For his part, Garbett keeps the style of *Out of the Further* consistent with what you would expect from an *Insidious* film: creepy house, creepier version of the house while in the further, etc. What I really give Garbett credit for though is some pretty stellar shot composition and framing. *Out of the Further* has a handful of shots where there are just *hints* of what is lurking around the corner, and requires the audience to quickly scan the entire frame for its secrets. I love when a horror cinematographer uses the entirety of their shot—it helps add a kind of built-in tension to each scene. Anyone who has seen the trailer is familiar with the “blanket fort” scene where main character Gemma is crawling through what seems like an endless, claustrophobic maze, but the trailer doesn't do the scene justice, and it is just one of the super effective tension-building scenes that rely heavily on expert camera work and sound to build the tension. I'm also happy to report that **THIS FILM IS PROPERLY LIT**, and even lit incredibly well, especially when we are in the further!

Building off of that, the sound design of *Out of the Further* is exceptional! I've come to really appreciate the *Insidious* franchise's sound design. *Insidious* films often maximize the placement of orchestral strikes to put a nice little bow on the jump scares; not to mention I

LOVE the **fantastic** string quartet theme song composed by Joseph Bishara (who is back to score this installment, although, sadly, he isn't left with much to do). What's interesting about *Out of the Further* though is that, more than previous entries, it utilizes the *absence* of sound instead. There are full scenes where you hear every faucet drip, or squeaky footsteps on the hardwood floors; it all ends up accentuating and heightening the scares! There is more to the sound design that needs to be discussed, but I will do so in the **spoilers section**!

Performance wise, the lion's share of the acting falls solely upon the shoulders of Amelia Eve. Eve is given a great character to work with—Gemma has built in trauma, and is hellbent on making her daughter's childhood the exact opposite of her own—so it is interesting to see Eve portray both of these sides of Gemma. I'm hopeful that, going forward, we will get to spend more time with Gemma.

Returning once again as the seemingly *eternal* "final girl" (if you could call her character that) is Lin Shaye as Elise. I will always welcome any opportunity for some Elise in my life, and while there *might* be an opening provided to expand her role in subsequent films (killing the character off in the original film has certainly become one of the franchise's single biggest missteps), Elise sadly doesn't really have very much screen time in this one, so enjoy her scenes while they last!

There are two other characters worth discussing, but I will save them for the **spoilers section**! I will, though, give special kudos to the two child actresses in this one: Island Austin's Maya and Charli Penton as young Gemma. Penton especially gives a great performance in the first 10-15 minutes of the movie, laying the foundations for Eve to round out Gemma's character arc.

Insidious: Out of the Further is a well-built, well-written, and well-acted entry into the *Insidious* series, and one of the more fun horror outings I've had this year (considering how much big-screen horror we've had, I sadly don't think very many of them have been very fun)! While it will be a surefire hit for longtime fans (and it **DOES** provide some really cool fan service by the end), it just might provide *enough* of a new spark for lapsed viewers to want to return to the further!

***SPOILER WARNING:** on the next page I will discuss aspects of the film I didn't want to spoil in the initial review, so only read on if you have seen the movie or do not plan to see it, but want to hear more about my thoughts!!!!

What I really liked the most about *Out of the Further* was its plot and the respect/ingenuity that it shows for the world-building already carried out by the franchise. Giving the Lambert family their proper sendoff in the previous installment was a big deal for me as a fan of the series, so it was kind of a tall order to say “hey, we are going to give you new heroes to root for (and some Elise)”, but Chase does a great job incorporating characters and scares from the *entire* franchise into this one! I felt like the marketing of *Out of the Further* was fine - it didn’t give away *too* much, although if they could have kept the whole Gemma being able to bring things in and out of the further under wraps, they could have *really* pulled off something cool.

The introduction of “Couriers” to the franchise does (at least for me) present a unique opportunity to at least *temporarily* bring Elise back, something that I feel has kind of become a bit of a problem for the series. It’s cool to have Elise just *out there* in the further watching over it, but it sure doesn’t make very much sense, especially by the end of this one, when we see that the dead can seemingly torture one another *in* the further. Why would the dead leave Elise alone when they are sentient enough to hold grudges, etc? This notion of “Couriers” also kind of dramatically raises the stakes of the franchise, making the dead a threat to *all* of the living as opposed to just being threats to “Travelers” and their families. I hope that, should they decide to continue making entries into this series, that they build off of this one, because for my money, “Couriers” are kind of a game changer.

As far as villains go, I really liked the introduction of series newcomer Cyrus. I felt that he was adequately creepy, but in a way that didn’t require heavy make-up or prosthetics like many of the other series’ antagonists. The sound design around him talking was great, and added an extra creepy layer to him. It was also really cool to see *all* of our favorite villains brought

back; I can only imagine how much havoc the entire *Insidious* villain gallery could reap if they were successfully brought out of the further. I also thought the introduction of Clare—the medium who Elise seems to now be using to communicate with the living—was pretty substantial. As a writer, I like when other writers can give us characters who have backstories that we don't necessarily have to know, and I felt like Clare was a very welcome addition to the team, even though I do miss Specs and Tucker.