



'It' Review: Stephen King's Psycho-Clown Epic 'Is the Stuff of Nightmares'

Bestselling novel of kids, secrets and the world's scariest razor-toothed clown gets the blockbuster treatment – and it's a doozy.

Expect all the bleak summer chatter about the dying box office to fade with the opening of *It*, a crowdpleasing frightfest bound for box-office paydirt. For weeks now, the trailers for the film version of Stephen King's terror classic have been cranking us up to lose our shit. That evil clown Pennywise, a spectacularly scary Bill Skarsgard (Alexander's brother), is the stuff of nightmares. The full-length movie, however, can't match the trailers for sustained terror – it runs a punishing two hours and 15 minutes (and it's only half of the novel). But *It* works enough of the time to deliver on the promise of bad dreams.

[...]Directed by Andy Muschietti (*Mama*), from a script by Chase Palmer, Gary Dauberman and Cary Fukunaga (*True Detective: Season One* – the good season) the film is based on King's 1986 novel which became a highly rated ABC miniseries in 1990 and featured Tim Curry as the nasty piece of business known as Pennywise. An R-rated movie, with its spray of gore and f-bombs, usually beats the pants off a safe network series anytime. And when Pennywise bites off a kid's arm, it's a cruncher. You'll scream bloody murder.

Which brings us to the plot. Children are disappearing in the town of Derry, Maine, courtesy of Pennywise, who shows up in Derry every 27 years and scares kids to death by transforming himself into their worst fears. The time is the late 1980s – King set the first part of the book in the 1950s when he was growing up – but the update suits Muschietti. Our heroes are still seven high school kids who call themselves "The Losers' Club," misfits who find their strength in sticking together. Jaeden Lieberher (*Midnight Special*) excels as Bill, the leader of the Club. It's the disappearance of his little cutie brother – the one Pennywise sucks into a sewer in the middle of a rain storm – that starts a panic. Finn Wolfhard plays Richie, the funny one; Jack Dylan Grazer is Eddie, the germaphobic one; Wyatt Oleff is Stanley, the Jewish one; Jeremy Ray Taylor is Ben, the chubby one; and Chosen Jacobs is Mike, the African-American one. The stereotypes are completed by the spirited Sophia Lillis as Beverly, the female one.

Yes, the boys – especially Bill and Ben – compete for her attention. And, yes, each is coping with a serious issue at home, from neglect to sexual abuse and violence. The parents are mostly absent; when they do appear, they're pretty monstrous themselves. All seven losers also must cope with bullying at the hands of the Bowers gang, led by a brutish bully named Henry (Nicholas Hamilton). But Pennywise is all their fears rolled up into one creepy, dancing clown with yellow teeth, a high-pitched squeak of a voice and a thing for the way fear induces kids to sweat. It makes them taste better, he says. All together now: Eww!

So that's *It* in a nutshell. If you want to see the losers grow up in 27 years and tackle Pennywise in his next appearance, sorry – you'll have to wait for Part 2. It's a bit of cheat, to be sure. But watching kids form a bond to rain down hell on a psycho clown really does play into our communal instinct to gather at the multiplex and watch things go bump in the night. This is no modern classic, like *The Babadook*. But *It* will creep you out big time.