*Poltergeist*

Directed by: Gil Kenan

Written by: David Lindsay-Abaire

Starring:

Sam Rockwell as Eric Bowen

Rosemarie DeWitt as Amy Bowen

Jared Harris as Carrigan Burke

Jane Adams as Dr. Brooke Powell

As our favorite pint-sized medium Tangina (Zelda Rubinstein) said in the original *Poltergeist*, “Hold on to yourselves.”

I will use that phrase of warning in this situation as well.

If you’re looking for our regular review of the newly released *Poltergeist*, simply follow this link.

If you are brave, cannot wait to see the film or simply never plan to view what you consider to be blasphemous (but still want the knowledge) – *read on*.

From here on out – this article is nothing but…

**SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS!**

**You have been warned.**

The film begins in the same fashion as the original. The Bowens are an ordinary family, only this time they’ve moved into a new home – which has a dark history in the ground beneath its foundation. Whereas the original has the Freelings already long-settled in their abode.

Eric Bowen (Sam Rockwell) and his wife Amy (Rosearie DeWitt) are taking a step down from a more comfortable life when he is laid off from his kushy job with John Deere.

Their new house is smack dab in a choice spot next to some towering power lines – to which their eldest daughter Kendra comments, “I can feel the tumors already.” Her joking is joined by the other two children, Griffin and Madison (Maddy) as they pull up to their new home. It’s suburbia and it’s not the prettiest slice of such a place.

They are shown around by the realtor, who neglects to inform them of a few key problems with the property. Take a guess.

Although he doesn’t want to, Eric agrees to take the place.

Griffin, their young son immediately senses some unpleasantness about the home. As the tour continues, it is revealed that one of the bedroom closets upstairs is practically sealed shut. There also seems to be a great deal of static electricity in the new home.

In addition, Griffin finds little Maddy talking to the closed closet door, her beloved stuffed toy “Piggy-Corn” in hand. (It’s a pig/unicorn creature – a pig with a horn).

Griffin doesn’t dig this closet chat.

Fast forward to their move in day. As is to be expected, it’s chaotic. Boxes everywhere, mailbox knocked over by the moving van, etc.

Griffin is placed in the very upstairs room – in fact an attic, complete with a skylight which perfectly frames the large tree on their property. The realtor earlier mentioned that the tree had been there long before the development. Uh-oh.

Initially, the strange things are kooky and fun (as in the original). The sealed closet door in Maddy’s room allows for some scientific fun. When the two youngest children place their hands on it, their hair springs up with that ever-present static electricity.

The first night for the eldest sister, Kendra is one of boredom. She chats online with a friend (who is now far away) and the two share a love of a “Ghost Hunters” – type show with Carrigan Burke (Jared Harris). The common tagline for his show is, “This house is clean”, once Carrigan has rid people of their supernatural problems.

The first night is far more trying for young Griffin. The tree looms over his bed, blowing lightly in the outside breeze. And then there’s the cubby-hole – complete with random, frightening noises.

Griffin investigates – only to find a small red ball hanging from somewhere in the nether-regions of the crawlspace. He pulls on it, and a box of toy clowns crash to the floor. The red ball is attached to a string, which retracts to the face of a very creepy clown. Once the nose is re-instated to the face, the clown cackles.

Understandably disturbed, Griffin interrupts an almost love-making session between his parents.

When Eric investigates the crawlspace, the first big scare of the film jumps out at you. It’s a squirrel!

There is chaos and then relieved laughter as the whole family is woken up by the rigamarole.

Later that night, the lights and electronics throughout the house engage, creating a path through the house, as if something is moving about.

Griffin is in bed with his parents, and is awoken by these disturbances. He moves through the house, to find little Maddy in front of their massive, flat-screen television – innocently talking to someone. Blue static reflects on her face – which is mere millimeters from the glowing screen. Griffin is concerned, asking who she is talking to. She touches the screen, based on the instructions of whomever she is talking to, and a hand appears on the other side, touching her outstretched palm. Several more hands fill the screen from “the other side”. Maddy turns to Griffin and says, “They’re coming.”

Griffin reacts by trying to unplug the television. He is thrown back by some electric shock, and there is a big ruckus. The remainder of the family rushes downstairs to investigate.

We then get a re-do of that iconic line, as Maddy turns from the screen. “They’re here.”

The next morning, Eric sets off to get squirrel traps, while Amy and the two younger children plant flowers in the front yard. Griffin finds some sort of bone, and is immediately told to re-bury it.

Eric has credit card troubles at the local hardware store, but returns home with the traps, as well as gifts for everyone in the family.

Immediately prior to his return home, Griffin experiences some strange occurrences in Maddy’s bedroom – including a baseball rolling along the floor by itself and a crate of comic books removing themselves from the crate and making a “house of cards” in the hallway outside Maddy’s room. He rushes downstairs, coinciding with Eric’s return – rambling on and on as Eric hands out gifts.

Amy questions how he paid for the gifts, but Eric blows it off.

That night, the parents are to attend a dinner party, leaving Kendra as the baby-sitter.

At the party, it is revealed that the housing development the Bowen’s are now part of, used to be a cemetery. With little fanfare, we find out that the headstones were moved, but the bodies were left behind. Uh-oh.

A storm front moves in.

Back at the house, Maddy is tucked in by Kendra – who then retires to the living room to chat on her new phone (her gift from dad). She begins to get interference as the electrical in the house again goes wonky. She follows what looks like a signal (a game of hot or cold) and it leads her to the garage. With a big rumble, the concrete below her feet, cracks. Kendra lifts up the corner that has broken off, and immediately a black sludge rushes up through the open hole. She sees what appears to be a corpse (another good “boo” moment) before several rotten arms grab her from the hole, and drag her down by one of the legs. She struggles and screams.

Meanwhile, Griffin is having troubles of his own. The clowns (yes, plural) are moving about his room, including the red-nosed one. It attacks him and eventually he smashes its face – leaving a hole with only the eyes remaining. The eyes watch Griffin move.

The nasty tree breaks through the skylight, covering Griffin in glass. He manages to escape the room and runs to check on Maddy. She’s huddled in a corner – clutching “Piggy-Corn”, as sounds from the closet grow stronger. Outside Maddy’s window, one of the tree branches slowly and menacingly scrapes across the glass. Griffin tells Maddy to stay there as he goes to find Kendra. The tree has worked its way through the skylight, into the house and grabs Griffin in the second floor hallway, whisking him away – all the way back through the skylight and into the storm.

Several spirits, emerge from the light bulbs in Maddy’s room and move into a now-open closet. They gather in what appears to be some empty space with no borders. Maddy watches in horror as “Piggy-Corn” is slowly moved into the black of the closet – continually flipping over as he is pulled closer. Naturally, Maddy follows her beloved toy into the abyss. She looks back to see the quickly retreating frame of the closet doors and her diminishing bedroom beyond. And another good scare as several pairs of hands grab her and take her further into the dark.

Eric and Amy arrive home to find Griffin screaming and dangling from the top of the tree. He is inexplicably let go, falling to the ground. At that moment, Kendra emerges from the house, saying that she can’t find Maddy.

A mad search of the house (as in the original) until Griffin finds the powered-up television on in the living room. The voice of Carol Anne (excuse me, Maddy) emanates from the screen. The entire family stares in astonishment.

The immediate aftermath has Amy insisting that they call the police, while Eric disagrees. There is no way to explain this.

And in a flash, they have brought in paranormal investigators to help them.

At the office of paranormal psychologist, Dr. Powell (Jane Adams), Amy and Griffin explain what has gone on. Dr. Powell and her two assistants, Boyd (Nicholas Braun) and Sophie (Susan Heyward) set up shop at the family’s haunted home. Griffin pleads with Dr. Powell to get his sister back, as he feels this is his fault (after leaving her in her room in all the chaos).

All of the equipment spans the house – cords and cameras everywhere. In a nice throwback to the original, Boyd brags about how he caught a paranormal experience on time-lapse, to which the poltergeist replies with a chair smashed against the wall.

Boyd approaches Griffin, asking if his out of work dad might be making this all up to get some money.

In the kitchen downstairs, Eric has a drink, but quickly pours out the remaining liquor when he begins vomiting up earthworms and dirt and sees his reflection in the sink faucet – worms falling from his orifices. As in the original, it’s a hallucination.

Boyd is told to install a heat sensor in the closet. He tries to drill a pilot hole, but the entire tool is yanked from his hand, including the trailing power cord. He naturally reaches in and is grabbed by something and held in place as the drill comes through the wall, ever closer to his face – which is now pinned to the wall. He is let go and sees heavy bruises on his forearm, in the shape of fingers. He looks to the closet wall and all is back to normal. A look back to his arm, and the bruising is gone.

Downstairs, Dr. Powell is ready to get underway. Maddy is contacted through the television again.

Things suddenly turn violent as Maddy’s shadow rushes about the house, seemingly chased by something. The group huddles in the center. Eric rushes up the stairs to Maddy’s room to find a small, whimpering figure in the corner of the closet. In another decent “boo” moment, it turns around to reveal a featureless face which is definitely not Maddy. In a fit of anger, Eric smashes the wall in the back of the closet, with a small table – which breaks in half. The chunk is sucked in and downstairs, the same piece of table emerges from a blistering area of the ceiling – slamming into the floor, almost killing Griffin.

As things settle, Griffin suggests that someone should go into the closet and show Maddy the way back. Dr. Powell agrees that it’s a good idea.

Another quick shift as Dr. Powell suggests they bring on board Carrigan Burke. Kendra is elated.

Cut to Griffin maneuvering a small drone with a camera, over the top of the house and into the street –just as Carrigan arrives alone – no camera crew.

There is some apparent history between Carrigan and Dr. Powell. Later it’s revealed that they were once briefly married.

Carrigan walks with a limp, revealing to the children several battle scars from previous ghost encounters.

Everyone in the house is given a GPS tracking unit, so they can be found at all times. Eric is skeptical, so which Carrigan replies along the lines of, “You believe all that you’ve seen, but you don’t believe me?” Through a lot of tears, Eric agrees that Carrigan can help.

Carrigan decides to use Griffin’s drone to make a first run into the other side – in an attempt to locate Maddy. A rope has been placed into the void, with its other end emerging from the living room ceiling (as in the original).

The drone goes in, revealing (shouldn’t have gone there, filmmakers) a hellish landscape of moving, slithering and decaying corpses. There is no up, down, left/right. They find Maddy among all of the death. There is a bit of chaos as they decide who will go into get her, Amy or Carrigan. As they bicker, Griffin – in his guilty state – makes the move and goes in after Maddy.

Griffin finds the drone and eventually Maddy – just as the corpses in the void begin to pull on the rope – tearing its bearings from Maddy’s bedroom wall, sending the rope spiraling into the darkness. Griffin and Maddy are able to grab the end, and appear in the ceiling hole in the living room. They are immediately rushed to the bathtub and revived.

Cut to the family packing their car, saying a farewell to Dr. Powell and her people and Carrigan.

Kendra records Carrigan saying his tagline, “This house is clean”, delighted to send it to her friend.

In the backseat, Maddy reveals that the house is not clean. She got away before she could lead the spirits to the light.

And then the s\*\*\* hits the fan. Their car is turned over and violently shoved into the house, smashing the walls and windows. Maddy is immediately taken (in a nice shot she is yanked up the stairs). The rest of the family escape the car and rush upstairs to find Maddy being sucked into her closet – all of her bedroom stuff flies by her. Amy is first to grab and it is a family chain as they all attempt to pull a floating Maddy into the hallway.

Outside, Dr. Powell and Carrigan and company watch in horror. (by the way – wouldn’t the neighbors have been out by this point, wondering what the hell is going on?)

A sea of sludge-covered corpses emerge from the closet, grasping desperately for Maddy’s dangling foot.

At that same moment, Carrigan proclaims to the house and the spirits that they “have no claim over this family”. The creatures retreat (that was easy) back into the closet and the family takes shelter in another room – just as the entire house begins to collapse. In the original, the family was outside when this happened. Here, they have to escape the crunching and smashing from the inside.

They eventually all escape, but not before Carrigan decides to sacrifice himself to lead the spirits into the light himself. He is taken into the void as Eric is the last one to escape the crumbling home.

Debris and sludge cover the front lawn as the family barrels into Kendra’s Mini-Cooper – avoiding corpses rising from the ground. The family speeds away. (I would have been okay with a retread of the original – having Eric scream, “Don’t look back!” – but it was not to be).

The house explodes behind them, as Dr. Powell and company look on.

It is later as Dr. Powell and her associates check on Carrigan’s GPS. It is located, somewhere near the void’s exit. He is apparently alive.

Cut to the family looking at a new house. The realtor brags about “ample closet space”, to which Amy replies, “Not a high priority.” Griffin looks quizzically at the new house.

The realtor moves into the house, talking about an old tree on the property that has been there since –

She turns around to find no one with her. Outside the family’s new van is speeding away. All seems well with the smiling family inside.

The credits begin and we then cut to Carrigan filming a new episode of his program – now with Dr. Powell by his side.

Fade to black.

As you can tell by the notes above, there’s not much new territory covered here. It’s modernized, shortened, dumbed-down and ultimately pointless. But it is well-produced and flashy.

If you’ve just read this entire synopsis with all of the spoilers intact, then you probably weren’t going to see this anyway.

Was this remake blasphemous? Maybe a little bit. Thank goodness I saved you the trouble.

On its own, it might not be too shabby. As a remake of a classic horror film, you have to ask yourself, “What was the point?”