

# That Damn Mist Lifted Yet?

By Robert Butterfield

King, Stephen. *The Mist*. New York: Signet 2007. 230 p.  
*The Mist*. Frank Darabont, Dir. 2007

This past year saw the concurrent release of the Stephen King's *The Mist* as both a movie and a stand-alone paperback. Previously published as a novella, it was at first featured in the excellent Kirby McCauley short horror collection *Dark Forces*, and then as a part of the King short story anthology, *Skeleton Crew*. In the new paperback edition, there appear to be no new changes to the content of the story, and the new book does not feature any new material: no forward, no afterward, no introduction. I therefore suggest that readers buy *Skeleton Crew* in paperback since it is only slightly more expensive than the new paperback—and contains over twenty other King stories, as well as *The Mist* in its entirety.

Having said that, I will get to the point—over twenty-five years after its original publication, *The Mist* still packs a helluva punch, as both a literary and cinematic experience. I (re)read the new paperback after seeing the movie, and I was impressed with how faithful the movie was to both the spirit and the content of the original work (Okay, the end of the movie is *very* different, but I will get back to that in a moment). The story cannot be read without picturing it, in one's head, as a movie. This means that it is a perfect candidate for cinematic adaptation. Frank Darabont, the director of two previous screen adaptations of King's work (*The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*) directs the new movie, and he has written the screenplay, as well. With *The Mist*, Darabont shows that he can deal with the more supernatural aspects of King's work with aplomb.

To those unfamiliar with the tale, the basic story is that, after a major storm, an unnatural-seeming mist settles over a Maine town. The protagonist of the story and his son are trapped in a supermarket with other inhabitants of the town as it becomes evident that there is a malignant presence lurking in the mist, and that those who venture out do so at their own (imminent) risk. Strange creatures appear and eventually interact with the town-folk, mostly by killing and eating them. But there is danger from within, as well. The townspeople turn on one another in a scenario reminiscent of the classic *Twilight Zone* episode penned by Rod Serling, *The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street*. The catalyst for this discord is the local religious fanatic, who is exceptionally portrayed in Darabont's movie by Marcia Gaye Hardin.

That is the basic setup, and all the qualities that made it a memorable King story are in evidence on the screen. Darabont knows how to ratchet up the tension. The special effects are very good, and the creatures are scary, including the spider-things that seem to pop up again in another recent horror movie, *Cloverfield*. The acting is also fine, and good casting helps to further maintain the integrity of the King novel. Thomas Jane and Nathan

Gamble flesh out the roles of the hero, David Drayton, and his son Billy, nicely. Veteran actors Andre Braugher, Toby Jones and Frances Sternhagen turn in first-rate supporting performances, and the rest of the cast follows suit. A major difference between the aforementioned *Cloverfield* (one of the scariest films I've seen in recent memory) and *The Mist* is that *The Mist* is essentially a story more concerned with the human dynamic than with the monsters that threaten from afar (or near).

There seems to be a faction of Stephen King enthusiasts who, while they like the majority of Darabont's adaptation, are upset with the one major change that he makes in the story. Without revealing the actual ending of either the film or the book, I will say that King's ending (the weakest link in story for me), which is somewhat reminiscent of the open-ended conclusion of Hitchcock's *The Birds*, has been replaced with a much, much darker turn from Darabont. While some have praised this as a courageous move on the part of the director, other people have stated that they feel it pulls the rug out from under the film. I am on the fence: it was shocking, but I am not sure that I was comfortable with some underlying issues the new ending presents. I do praise Darabont for making a difficult and not particularly commercially viable choice.

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