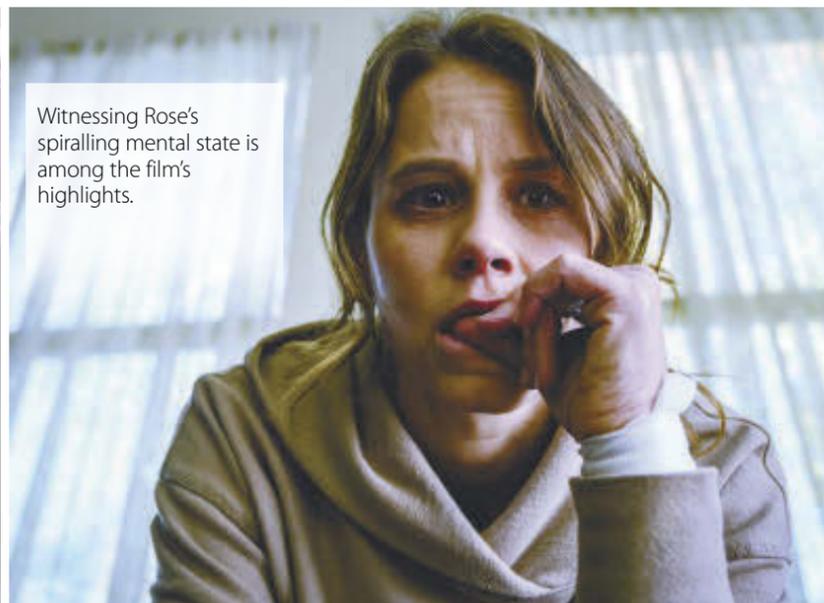




The evil being is known to take different identities.



Witnessing Rose's spiralling mental state is among the film's highlights.

BY JOHN TAN

FOR quite some time now, I have been bored with the standard horror flicks Hollywood has been churning out in recent years. As a fan of the genre who grew up with classics like *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*, it feels as if Hollywood lost its touch.

With a few exceptions, the majority of modern scary flicks fail to carry the same weight. Hence, I am always quick to devour any remarkable ones that come out of Hollywood. Like Paramount Pictures' latest masterpiece *Smile*.

Directed by Parker Finn, *Smile* follows Dr Rose Cotter, a young psychiatrist who consults patients with deeply disturbing traumas on a daily basis. But when a young student steps into her office complaining about a supernatural being, Rose is taken aback.

This is especially true after she witnesses the patient slicing her own face while smiling grimly. The horror, however, does not end in the waiting room. Instead, it follows Rose around and clings to her.

Slowly, Rose experiences strange paranormal events in her life. So much so that it forces her to retreat from her job, family and everyone else around her. But thanks to some research, she soon discovers that this evil being thrives on trauma.

In addition, she learns that her time is running out. As such, Rose is determined to get down to her root and fight for her life.

Trauma kills

From the get-go, the film establishes the link between horror and trauma. Even before the evil being is introduced, *Smile* ties Rose to the traumatic events from her early childhood, thus making the link to the demon and her trauma more natural.

In fact, the psychological aspect was surely the film's main highlight. It was such a thrill to witness how the filmmakers elaborate on horror through the lens of psychology. While other past thriller shows have attempted this same issue, *Smile* does not try too hard with its interpretation.

Contrary to the rest, it is easier to comprehend its exploration and a lot more entertaining. Speaking of which, *Smile's* protagonist Rose, played by Sosie Bacon – daughter of Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick – is a delight to watch.

Her character arc and mental state timeline throughout the movie alone are enough to keep viewers in their seats. Kudos to Bacon for portraying her brilliantly!

Angles maketh movie

To pull off such a contemporary masterpiece, a certain standard of cinematography is required. Given the film's nature, it is important to have quality camera angles and movements to bring out the film's essence – which of course was not absent in *Smile*.

In each of the scenes, proper cinematography was utilised to highlight its purpose and richness. Take, for example, the film's intelligent use of jump scares. Though it is indeed the oldest trick in the book, cinematographer Charlie Sarroff maximises



Actress Sosie Bacon is perfectly cast as Dr Rose. – ALL PIX BY PARAMOUNT PICTURES

A long time coming

➤ *Smile* turns the frown upside down with its fresh take on the intersectionality of trauma and horror

the tactic appropriately.

Sarroff use does not fall flat, especially during crucial sequences like Rose's mental transitions or the evil being's hauntings.

Reveal yourself, demon

However, if there is one thing I would critique about the picture would be the demon's identity. From the genesis to the end not much is revealed about the demon's origins. While its methods are depicted, its backstory is not played out.

As such, it was a bit puzzling. Even the protagonist was left confused, demanding answers regarding its identity whenever it

would haunt her. Hence, a bit of backstory would have been helpful.

The haunting continues

But that is not something to harp on. Seeing the ending of *Smile* and its impressive box office performance, it is safe to assume that viewers like myself will be seeing more of it in the future. And judging from its debut, it is going to be one hell of a ride!

Smile hands down is the horror picture many of us have been waiting for. If you have yet to see it, go catch it at your local cinema – it will give you the haunting you have been dying for!

