



Screen, Screen Reviews

Glass – Review

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Written by [Jacob Heayes](#) | Feb 13, 2019

One doesn't need to look hard to notice that the cinematic landscape has evolved in the past couple of decades. Whilst Disney – and by extension Marvel – currently dominate the box office with superhero bonanzas, it wasn't long ago that comparatively unconventional lower-budget fare was electrifying audiences in a largely similar fashion.

Released at the turn of the century, M. Night

Shyamalan's *Unbreakable* confidently fitted into this group of misfits. A comic-book film not owing itself to any source material, it was a deviously clever and textually rich adaptation of superhero myths rather than any singular existing character or arc. *Glass* represents Shyamalan's long-awaited return to the material, a perplexing work whose eccentricities are exaggerated by its similarities to those misfit movies, even when much of cinema has moved on.

Glass represents the splicing of both *Unbreakable* and *Split*, the 2017 psychological thriller that doubled as a surprise stealth sequel introducing audiences to The Beast (James McAvoy), a new villain bearing multiple menacing personalities for *Unbreakable*'s David Dunn (Bruce Willis) to fight. The first act lures the audience into an unnerving sense of security. There's the heightened suspense, the action, the long-awaited reintroduction of gestating characters one would naturally come to expect with not just an *Unbreakable* sequel, but a modern superhero film period. As an opening that plays so close to expectation, it left me feeling a little uneasy – where had the methodical pacing, the focus on character drama gone? Had M. Night truly sacrificed this for mainstream appeal?

Thankfully, the film promptly detours and abandons the adrenaline for a patient, deliberate drama that is admittedly unrefined, but fulfilling and creatively reinvigorating.

‘riveting in its anger and stubbornness’

This film centres on its leading trio and for the most part, the performances are worthy of the massive responsibility given to them. James McAvoy predictably nails his reprise as the fractured personalities of Kevin Wendell Crumb. Utilising eerie single-take sequences, McAvoy extraordinarily changes his inflection and body language several times unedited, embodying several characters within seconds of each other. His erratic performance creates a wonderful sense of menace and surprise, building off his already impressive turn in *Split* and solidifying himself as a legitimate threat that clicks effortlessly in this world. Whilst I doubt Willis will ever fully invest himself in cinema again, he’s used sparingly here and he invests himself at least a tad in David Dunn, to a point where I still resonated with his arc. Shockingly, this is without even mentioning Samuel L. Jackson’s restrained performance as the titular Mr. Glass. A largely contained and understated role this time around, Jackson injects the character with an unexpected pathos.

His transformation emphasises this film’s fascinating examination of the superhero mythos and the contemporary comic-book film as a whole – that is *Glass* doesn’t so much focus on what makes these people extraordinary, but rather what makes them *ordinary*. Shyamalan dissects the psychological conflict of whether these characters are mere vessels of delusion or genuinely transcendent, incredible beings on a grander scale – and whether this debate matters in the first place. The weak point of all this is that Shyamalan’s expression of these ideas is scattershot, relying too much on expository dialogue that is unwieldy and repetitive. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Sarah Paulson’s character, who unfortunately is written almost exclusively to keep audiences up to speed with the already minimal narrative. Yet when these themes and ideas come to fruition, as evidenced in the execution of the ingenious final confrontation, it’s riveting in its anger and stubbornness.

‘abandons the adrenaline for a patient, deliberate drama that is admittedly unrefined, but fulfilling and creatively reinvigorating’

This is all brought together by West Dylan Thordson's sharp score and Mike Gioulakis' suitably clinical and methodical cinematography, both returning from *Split* and very much recapturing that film's audiovisual palette. All in all, *Glass* sets out to be the trilogy closer that no-one asked for in a sense that's both thrilling and peculiar. It's deliberately meandering, viciously vandalising your expectations and closes on a note that reminds you that yes, this is an M. Night Shyamalan film. Many will hate this film and maybe I'm an oddball for finding its brand of subversion so appealing. This isn't the comic-book film we needed, but it's most certainly the one we deserved.



3.5



GLASS

JAMES MCAVOY

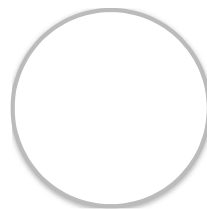
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