

# The Unholy (2021 film)

***The Unholy*** is a 2021 American supernatural horror film written, produced, and directed by Evan Spiliotopoulos (in his directorial debut), based on the 1983 novel *Shrine* by James Herbert. Produced by Sam Raimi through his Ghost House Pictures banner, it stars Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Katie Aselton, William Sadler, Diogo Morgado, Cricket Brown, and Cary Elwes. The film follows on a disgraced journalist (Morgan) who discovers a series of seemingly divine miracles in a small New England town and uses them to resurrect his career, though those "miracles" may have a much darker source.<sup>[4]</sup>

The project was announced in December 2018 under the working title *Shrine*, with Sony Pictures adapting Herbert's novel of the same name. The cast was announced between 2018 and 2020, with principal photography commencing in Boston, but on March 14, 2020, filming was suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*The Unholy* was theatrically released in the United States on April 2, 2021.

## Plot

In 1845, in Banfield, Massachusetts, Mary Elnor, a woman who has been accused of witchcraft, is hanged from a tree and set on fire. After she dies, however, her ash is kept in a kern doll, indicating the doll has been possessed by Mary's spirit.

In the present day, disgraced journalist Gerry Fenn works a job reporting on all things unusual. An assignment takes him to Boston, where the purported strange activity is revealed to be a teenage prank. While preparing to leave, he discovers the doll and crushes it, accidentally freeing Mary's spirit. Gerry later gets into an accident while driving away after seeing a young girl, Alice Pagett, run across the road. He follows Alice to the tree where Mary was hanged, the site where he found the doll, and hears her speak before collapsing. He takes her to a church and learns that Alice is deaf and mute. Gerry decides to stay in town to investigate what he thinks could be a real story of the supernatural.

The following day, Alice stuns the community by speaking, proclaiming that she has been cured by the Virgin Mary. This launches a media furore that is further propelled by other seemingly

### The Unholy



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>Evan Spiliotopoulos</u>
<b>Screenplay by</b>	<u>Evan Spiliotopoulos</u>
<b>Based on</b>	<i><u>Shrine</u></i> by <u>James Herbert</u>
<b>Produced by</b>	<u>Sam Raimi</u> <u>Robert Tapert</u> <u>Evan Spiliotopoulos</u>
<b>Starring</b>	<u>Jeffrey Dean Morgan</u> <u>Katie Aselton</u> <u>William Sadler</u> <u>Diogo Morgado</u> <u>Cricket Brown</u> <u>Cary Elwes</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<u>Craig Wroblewski</u>
<b>Edited by</b>	<u>Jake York</u>
<b>Music by</b>	<u>Joseph Bishara</u>

miraculous healings. During one of them, a statue of the Virgin Mary near the chancel of the church cries tears of blood. The Catholic Church sends Monsignor Delgarde to investigate the claims, assisted by Bishop Gyles. Alice tells Gerry that while she has been speaking to an entity named Mary, she has only assumed that it was the Virgin Mary. Beginning to suspect that something sinister is occurring due to visions of "Mary" as a horrific creature, Gerry finds a partner in Father William Hagan, Alice's maternal uncle, whom she healed, but also suspects the healings' true nature. Hagan discovers a book detailing Mary Elnor, who performed miracles for Satan. Before he has the chance to warn anybody, Elnor attacks him. His body is found hanging in the church. Gyles convinces Gerry to keep the apparent suicide of Hagan quiet as it will tarnish the divine occurrences; Hagan's death is declared an accident.

<b>Production companies</b>	<u>Screen Gems</u> <u>Ghost House Pictures</u>
<b>Distributed by</b>	<u>Sony Pictures Releasing</u>
<b>Release date</b>	April 2, 2021
<b>Running time</b>	99 minutes
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$10 million <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$31 million <sup>[2][3]</sup>

Gerry befriends Natalie Gates, the town's physician, and reveals that he was found fabricating stories. That is why he now reports hoax stories, hoping this event will relaunch his career. The pair comes across the information Hagan discovered, revealing Elnor sold her soul to Satan in order to gain power. Satan would allow her and her descendants (one of whom being Alice) to perform "miracles" prompting people to pledge themselves to her, and in turn, Satan. Elnor tries to kill Gerry, but Delgarde drives her away with prayer and a crucifix. Gerry and Delgarde are shocked to learn that Gyles was aware of Elnor's story but thought that it was not connected to the recent miracles. He warns Gerry that any attempt to share his views on the situation will fall on deaf ears due to Gerry's tarnished reputation.

Alice, who they believe is unaware of Mary's true nature, wishes to hold a church service by the tree and broadcast it to the masses. Delgarde warns that those pledging themselves to Elnor would make her stronger and condemn their soul to Hell. Gerry, Natalie and Delgarde try to perform a ritual in the church to stop this, but Elnor appears and crushes Delgarde with a burning cross.

Once the service begins, Alice urges everyone to pledge themselves to Mary three times. Gerry manages to stop the crowd from fully pledging by claiming that the miracles were just more of his hoaxes, that they were all a result of the placebo effect. Natalie communicates with Alice using sign language, urging her to stop the service. Mary speaks to Alice, entreating her to continue it or never speak again. Realizing Mary's true nature, Alice confirms that the miracles were not of God. The tree bursts into flames, causing all the attendants to flee in panic as an angry Mary emerges from it. She incinerates Gyles before attempting to kill Gerry, but Alice sacrifices herself to save his life. This causes Mary to disappear, as Alice was her link to the living world. Struck by Alice's sacrifice, Gerry begs God to save her life. She comes back to life but is once again deaf. All the people whom Alice cured soon return to their prior state.

## Cast

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- Jeffrey Dean Morgan as Gerald "Gerry" Fenn
- Cricket Brown as Alice Pagett
- William Sadler as Father William Hagan
- Katie Aselton as Natalie Gates
- Cary Elwes as Bishop Gyles

- [Diogo Morgado](#) as Monsignor Delgarde
- [Bates Wilder](#) as Geary
- [Marina Mazepa](#) as Mary Elnor
- [Christine Adams](#) as Monica Slade
- [Gisela Chipe](#) as Sofia Walsh
- [Dustin Tucker](#) as Dan Walsh
- [Danny and Sonny Corbo](#) as Toby Walsh
- [Madison LaPlante](#) as Faithful Teen Girl

## Production

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On December 3, 2018, [Deadline](#) reported that [Screen Gems](#) and [Sam Raimi](#) would produce *Shrine*, a film adaptation of [James Herbert's](#) horror novel of the same name, with [Evan Spiliotopoulos](#) writing the script and making his directorial debut.<sup>[4]</sup> On September 18, 2019, [Jeffrey Dean Morgan](#) was cast in the film.<sup>[5]</sup> On November 12, 2019, [Jordana Brewster](#) joined the cast of the film.<sup>[6]</sup> On February 27, 2020, [Katie Aselton](#), [William Sadler](#), [Diogo Morgado](#), [Cricket Brown](#), [Marina Mazepa](#), [Christine Adams](#), [Bates Wilder](#) and [Cary Elwes](#) joined the cast of the film, with Aselton replacing Brewster.

[Principal photography](#) commenced in [Boston](#) that same week,<sup>[7]</sup> but on March 14, 2020, filming was suspended because of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#).<sup>[8]</sup> When filming resumed, due to [CDC](#) guidelines there could be no more than 10 background actors on set together at once, forcing Spiliotopoulos to use "the same people in five different places".<sup>[9]</sup>

## Release

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In March 2021, the film's new title was announced as *The Unholy*,<sup>[10]</sup> along with a [trailer](#) and a scheduled release date of April 2, 2021.<sup>[11]</sup> The film release digitally on May 25, 2021, and on [Blu-ray](#), [DVD](#) and [Ultra HD Blu-ray](#) on June 22, 2021.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

*The Unholy* grossed \$15.6 million in the United States and Canada and \$15.4 million in other territories for a worldwide total of \$31 million.<sup>[2]</sup>

*The Unholy* grossed \$1.2 million on its first day and a total of \$3.2 million from 1,850 theaters its opening weekend, finishing second at the box office behind fellow newcomer *Godzilla vs. Kong*.<sup>[13]</sup> The film dropped 23% to \$2.4 million in its second weekend,<sup>[14]</sup> then made \$2 million in its third.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Critical response

[Review aggregator](#) [Rotten Tomatoes](#) reports that 27% of 60 critics gave the film a positive review and an average rating of 4.90/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "Rarely scary and often dull, *The Unholy* falls back on the same tired tropes that have already been done to death by countless other religious horror movies."<sup>[15]</sup> [Metacritic](#) assigned a weighted average score of 36 out of 100 based on 15 critics, indicating

"generally unfavorable reviews".<sup>[16]</sup> Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "C+" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak reported 52% of audience members gave it a positive score, with 37% saying they would definitely recommend it.<sup>[13]</sup>

Alonso Duralde of the *TheWrap* said that "you've seen this one before, countless times" and wrote: "Sam Raimi is a producer here, and it's hard not to think about how he might have mined this material both for provocation and for fright; his *Drag Me to Hell* remains the gold standard of how to scare the heck out of an audience within the restrictions of PG-13. What we get instead here is a tepid little chiller with an overqualified cast."<sup>[17]</sup>

*Movieguide*, which reviews films from a Christian perspective, opined that *The Unholy* is a "well-made, captivating horror movie with a strong Christian worldview. It's clear early on that the Christian characters recognize the tension between good and evil".<sup>[18]</sup>

The film was met with controversy from Catholics almost immediately once the promotional cycle started. Michigan based Reverend Gordon Reigle said of the concept "Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ and, therefore, the spiritual mother to all Christians. Does anyone enjoy seeing their mother mocked or offended? I don't think so".<sup>[19]</sup>

## See also

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- Exorcism in Christianity

## References

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## External links

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- Official website (<http://www.theunholy.movie/>)
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