Sinister is a 2012 supernatural horror film directed by Scott Derrickson, and written by C. Robert Cargill. The film was released on October 12, 2012 and premiered at the SXSW festival. Sinister was inspired by a nightmare Cargill had after watching the 2002 film The Ring.

Starring

Ethan Hawke as Ellison Oswalt

Juliet Rylance as Tracy Oswalt

Fred Thompson as Sheriff

James Ransone as Deputy

Michael Hall D’Addario as Trevor Oswalt

Clare Foley as Ashley Oswalt

Nick King portrays Bughuul/Mr. Boogie appear in supporting roles.

The crime writer Ellison Oswalt moves into a home with his wife Tracy, their 12-year-old son Trevor, and their 7-year-old daughter Ashley. Unbeknownst to his wife and children, Ellison has moved them into the home where the Stevenson family were killed by hanging. He decides to write about it as well as the disappearance of the family’s daughter.

Ellison finds a box in the attic that contains a scorpion, as well as a projector and reels of Super 8 films, each labeled as home movies. The films are footage of different families being murdered in various ways. Each killing is performed by the unseen camera operator. The mystery deepens. Who are these people? Who is killing them? Who is holding the camera? In each instance, one of the kids in the family disappears. Where did they go?

The film works best on deepening those questions, along with how it showcases its villain, a demonic figure called Bughuul. Clad in a suit, and with a head covered in long hair flowing down over hollow eyes and a mouthless face, Bughuul haunts the edges, a form appearing in images, videos, and even in the flesh, but it’s not a presence that attacks in a traditional way. Instead, he lurks, waiting for what only he knows. In the end, we know why he’s here. The Oswalt family is the next to die in a jaw-dropping ending where Ellison’s young daughter killing her family with an axe while the Bughuul entity and the possessed missing children watch on. There is no happy ending. No one is saved . All we are left with is terror.

This new spin on a familiar story works best because of those Super 8 films. They’re so realistic looking, almost like snuff films, that it’s chilling. We get other tapes of a family being drowned in a pool, a tied-up family being set afire in their car, another having their throats slit, and most terrifying of all, one film simply titled “Lawn Work ‘86”.

Sinister was one of the surprise hits of 2012, with word of mouth leading to a box office haul of $48 million domestically on just a $ 3 million budget. A 2020 study by Broadband Choices named Sinister the scariest film ever made, based on an analysis of viewer heart rates.

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