



Enthusiastic, cine-literate retelling of Stephen King's horror novel

The first in a two-part adaptation of the killer clown book has a soft spot for its troubled young heroes



IT-SCENE-1234

becomes obsessed with finding the lost boy. As the summer vacation of '89 rolls around, and yet more youngsters disappear, a group of variously bullied "Losers" embark upon a Stand By Me-style quest through the woods and into the sewers, in search of a mythical monster.

Significantly, each of our key characters is haunted by nightmarish apparitions that feed upon their individual fears. Mike (Chosen Jacobs) sees visions of fiery tragedy that chime with suppressed memories of childhood trauma; Stanley (Wyatt Oleff) is distracted from his bar mitzvah rehearsals by a chaotic face that leers at him from a painting; hypochondriac Eddie (Jack Dylan Grazer) is pursued by "a walking infection" that seems to embody his mother's



4 / 5 stars

overprotective fantasies. As for Sophia Lillis's abused but strongly self-sufficient Beverly ("Who invited Molly Ringwald into the group?"), her Carrie-like anxieties manifest in a bloody eruption that owes less to the lift sequence from *The Shining* than to Johnny Depp's demise in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

With his gangly arms and marionette gait, Skarsgård's wall-eyed killer clown resembles a baby-faced relative of Freddy Krueger. No surprise, then, that *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5* is seen playing at the local cinema. This is a self-reflexively cine-literate world, in which posters for *Gremlins* and *Beetlejuice* hang on children's walls, and the gateway to the monster's lair resembles Norman Bates's home from *Psycho*. In one bravura sequence, the kids use a slide projector to mount their own movie show, which is promptly hijacked by Pennywise in the manner of the spectral Sadako from *Ring*.



Cinematographer Chung Chung-hoon, who has worked regularly with Park Chan-wook, keeps his cameras gliding



Tackling only the early years of King's chunky source, this "Chapter One"

"It's summer, we're supposed to be having fun. This isn't fun – it's scary and disgusting!" It, Stephen King's 1986 novel about a shape-shifting demon that terrorises the town of Derry, Maine, was memorably filmed for TV in 1990. Boasting a mesmerising star turn by Tim Curry as the malevolent dancing clown, Pennywise, Tommy Lee Wallace's mini-series became every coulrophobe's worst nightmare, rivalling Tobe Hooper's Salem's Lot for the title of best small-screen King adaptation.

Now, the Argentinean director Andy Muschietti, who directed 2013's creepy *Mama*, brings a touch of widescreen gloss to King's enduring horror-adventure. Drawing heavily on such 80s screen favourites as *Poltergeist* and *The Goonies* (both of which were co-written/produced by Steven Spielberg), this latest incarnation will resonate with audiences hooked on the nostalgic weirdness of Netflix's *Stranger Things*. The chills may be more funhouse than frightful, but Muschietti's tangible affection for the misfit schoolkids at the centre of this story draws us into their world, lending engaging weight to their (pre)adolescent trials and tribulations.

Tackling only the early years of King's chunky source, this "Chapter One" (a sequel is due to follow) relocates the coming-of-age section of the novel from the 50s to the late 80s. Here, poor Georgie Denbrough is dragged into a storm drain by the evil Pennywise (Bill Skarsgård, ably filling Curry's oversize clown shoes). Riddled with guilt and grief, Georgie's older brother Bill (Jaeden Lieberher, who shone in *Midnight Special*),