



# STIGMATA

NY subways get worse: Arquette tormented by demons.

by Mark Evans

Thanks to *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Sixth Sense*, horror has become a fashionable genre in Hollywood again.

Following closely on the heels of both movies comes *Stigmata*. While not in the same league as the two aforementioned films, it still manages to cough up a few good scares and some controversy to boot.

Gabriel Byrne plays Father Andrew Kiernan, a Catholic priest and Organic Chemist, who is sent around the globe to debunk miracles (the Virgin Mary appearing on the side of a wall, for example) for the Church.

He is sent to Pittsburg to investigate a young woman,

Frankie Page (Patricia Arquette), who has started showing stigmata, the wounds given to Christ on the cross. Things start to develop from there, and the film keeps ratcheting up both the level of horror and the suspense.

With the exception of Johnathan Pryce, whose role is written and subsequently played with no depth whatsoever, the acting in *Stigmata* is top notch. Byrne's Father Andrew is particularly well-done, showing a man who wears the collar yet clearly puts more faith in science than God.

The direction is fantastic on the whole, although there seems a deliberate inclusion of more religious symbolism than necessary. The visuals are reminiscent of *Se7en*, with dark colors and

shadows throughout, illustrating the decadence of modern society.

*Stigmata* does have problems that keep it from being a highly commendable film, however. The biggest is probably the ending, which is abrupt and abandons several characters without closure.

Ambiguous endings are ample in films like *Before Sunrise* and *Pleasantville*, but in *Stigmata* we are left without any hint of how things worked out. It is a cheat to the audience when they have to imagine scenes which were cut or never written. Finally, the ending can easily be predicted by anyone who is paying attention.

A couple warnings, however. This film is extremely bloody. The scenes in which

stigmata manifest are gory by necessity, and it does not get any better from there on. The film can be extremely intense at times as well, which is exactly its aim.

*Stigmata* may cause some uneasiness among the religiously devout, especially hard-core Catholics. In addition to the main story line of the film, which will not be given away here, some may see *Stigmata* as an attack on faith in general. This is especially so, given that Frankie is an atheist displaying a trait often reserved for the religiously devout. However, *Stigmata* is not anti-Catholic, and people should view it with an open mind.

*Stigmata* merits a good three stars out of four, it's slightly flawed but has a lot to recommend it.



Close cut: Patricia Arquette plays a hairdresser with serious spiritual issues.

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