



# Nick Prescott's Reviews

**1408**

Talent: John Cusack, Samuel L. Jackson, Mary McCormack, Tony Shalhoub, Jasmine Jessica Anthony.

Date of review: Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2007

Director: Mikael Hafstrom

Duration: 104 minutes

Classification: M

We rate it: 2 and a half stars.

1408 is a puzzling film, in many ways. It's puzzling primarily because John Cusack is in it, and it's not a very good film. This is an oddity, in my opinion; the ever-likeable Cusack very rarely steps out of line, usually pairing engaging turns as co-writer with canny role choices onscreen. Sadly, this, Cusack's latest outing as a leading man, is a very dull experience; he neither wrote nor produced nor executive-anythinged it; indeed it seems suspiciously like he might have been offered too good a deal as an actor to refuse, and that he took the money and ran. Don't get me wrong, he's fun to watch, and he plays the not-quite-average-Joe with great skill, but it's all in service of a film that you're likely to forget the moment the final credits' reflection fades from your eyeballs.

It's difficult for many of us critics to review a film like 1408 and not sound bitchy. To isolate the positives, then: this is a technically proficient psychological thriller with dashes of the supernatural; it's sometimes exciting, sometimes mysterious and atmospheric, and it showcases some effective cinematography and a creepy score. The film is based on a Stephen King short story, and (to return to the not-so-effective elements) it takes the old "Hotel with one creepy room no-one ever goes into alone" idea and manages to make it about as uninteresting as this kind of film so often does.

Cusack plays Mike Enslin, a man with a troubled past, an estranged wife, and a missing daughter about whom we'll learn more by the time the film winds up. Enslin is currently making a living as a kind of "journalist of the supernatural" – he seeks out locations and buildings that are reputed to be haunted, spends time there and writes his experiences into lurid best-selling paperbacks. Early in the film, information comes Mike's way that suggests he should visit a mysterious old hotel in New York called The Dolphin. The Dolphin's room 1408 is, you guessed it, shrouded in mystery; no-one is allowed to reside there, and even the staff clean the room only once a year, and then only in pairs. Mike's professional curiosity is aroused and he insists on booking a night in the room, much against the better judgement of hotel manager Samuel L. Jackson.

This is, sadly, the point at which the film begins to get very silly indeed. The thing that so many films of this kind just can't quite get right is the transition from mysterious and intriguing opening through explanation of mystery to satisfying resolution. Like so many other Stephen King stories, when the reasons for the strange goings on become apparent, they are inevitably disappointing, if not outright laughable, and the creepy atmosphere becomes hokey and preposterous.

Cusack tries his best, as do cinematographer Benoit Delhomme and composer Gabriel Yared (both of whom have done absolutely beautiful work in the past), but when all is said and done, 1408 can never transcend its inherent silliness.

Nick Prescott