

Zac Efron's Ted Bundy biopic is worth a trip to the cinema

 By [Ayesha Abrahams](#)

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If you were into High School Musical as a kid, chances are you've kept tabs on Zac Efron and have watched (and possibly drooled over) his metamorphosis. I'm old enough to admit to having been a Troy Bolton fan and was more than just a little curious to see Efron take on the role of infamous American serial killer Ted Bundy. The main concern people had about *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* was that Efron would play some part in glamorising a serial murderer. After watching it this weekend, I can assure you that this is far from true.



Even if you've never seen Netflix's *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, you'll probably recognise the name. Bundy was a sociopathic serial killer who brutalised and murdered an estimated 30 women during the 1970s. As an attractive, charming law student, he effortlessly hoodwinked his victims. This killer's *modus operandi* included pretending to be injured and then eliciting help from women and after he'd lured them away, he'd incapacitate them and go about his business. If you're struggling to picture Efron's wholesome face on a man capable of such atrocities, you're not the only one. Despite critics' harsh reviews, I think he did a good job portraying Bundy.

Performances that make up for the small inaccuracies

We start off with a lovely scene in a bar and just Bundy dancing with single mom Elizabeth Kloepfer (Lily Collins). He is portrayed as the perfect gentleman, someone who's more than happy to simply fall asleep beside an attractive woman. Kloepfer wakes the next morning to find her baby's crib empty. Despite this minor heart attack, we soon learn he has no murderous inclinations towards his girlfriend and her kid. He saves that for other women.



The film has been cleverly edited and we have beautiful suburban scenes overlaid with harrowing news reports. Switching between footage of dead victims and loving scenes between a couple and a child is unsettling, to say the least. It's not clear why Bundy never harms Kloepfer or her child, but they don't delve that far into the story in this film. Those details are omitted and it is one of the biggest criticisms of *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*, but I think Collins, Efron, John Malkovich (who plays the judge with a dry sense of humour) and Jim Parsons (who you'll recognise as Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory*) deliver first-class performances that make up for the small inaccuracies.



I can't imagine how difficult it must be for the families of victims to watch a biopic like this. A film about a serial killer could

easily overstep boundaries by using unnecessary sensationalism. Thankfully, it doesn't happen this time around. The story is still incredibly powerful, even though the crimes are not directly shown. There are a few photos that flash up on the screen – a weapon kit and blood-splattered pillows – but nothing that would make the average viewer hurl. In an interview, Efron says his intention was not to glorify a killer but to show people killers could – and sometimes do – come packaged as incredibly intelligent, beautiful individuals. He wanted the film to be a cautionary tale of sorts. For the most part, I think he's achieved this goal.



When I sat down to watch this Ted Bundy biopic, I imagined I'd enter a moral grey area by wanting to sympathise with a killer, but I didn't. From the beginning, the viewer is told of Bundy's crimes. We are repulsed before we get the chance to fall in love with his face and his charm. However, this wasn't the case with all the viewers. After several worrying tweets about the serial killers' attractiveness surfaced, Netflix was forced to join the conversation, gently reminding viewers to stop 'thirsting' over convicted serial killers.

There's bound to be mixed responses to a film as controversial as *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*. This is a real-life 'don't-judge-a-book-by-its-cover-tale'. Zac Efron fangirl or not, I think this film's worth a trip to the cinema.

**The film was meant to be released on Netflix on 3 May 2019, but it hasn't been uploaded to SA's version of the application yet. There are, however, a select number of cinemas currently offering it in South Africa.*

ABOUT AYESHA ABRAHAMS

Ayesha is a self-confessed bibliophile. When she's not reading stories, she's writing them. This former teacher and editor is a diehard Potterhead. Currently she's completing her MA in Creative Writing. Ayesha will almost always choose tea over coffee, and writes articles when she's supposed to be working on her thesis.

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