

Apt Pupil (1998)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 51 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 5; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 3.5

Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Isaiah 5:20

This adaptation of Stephen King's novella proves again that the dark recesses of the human soul can be far scarier and more horrible than supernatural evil. *Apt Pupil* is a chronicle of the moral disintegration of a likable high school student when he comes into contact with a Nazi hiding in his city. A typical teenager, "an apt pupil" his report card says, Todd Bowden (Brad Renfro) is fascinated by the study of the Holocaust in his high school class. He takes out library books and pours over them.

One day he thinks he recognizes an old man (Ian McKellan) on the bus as a Nazi he had seen in one of the photographs. He runs a check after obtaining the man's fingerprints and discovers that the man is in fact Kurt Dussander, Nazi war criminal. There follows a long relationship, based on blackmail and mutual hatred and fascination, Todd forcing Dussander to tell him all he can remember about the Holocaust.

In one especially frightening scene, Dussander, dressed in a Nazi uniform Todd had bought at a costume shop, marches back and forth in the small room, his footsteps thundering and shaking the walls. Obsessed with horrific memories, the old

man is transformed into a uniformed monster of great power, so that the frightened Todd forces him to stop.

While not as dark or as engaging as the novella, which was told from Todd's viewpoint and transpired over a far longer period of time, the film is nonetheless an effective example of the seductiveness and the corrupting power of evil, Todd becoming, if possible, even more of a moral monster than Dussander. The only difference between the two is that the old man had had far greater opportunity to inflict his evil on others than Todd. At the end of the film we can only shudder at the teenager's future.