

Television

Wise brings sharp detail to the devil

His Satanic majesty gives 'Reaper' a lift

By Bill Keveney
USA TODAY

Oh, that diabolical smile. "I think that's what won them over in the audition," says Ray Wise, the devil incarnate in the new CW adventure-comedy *Reaper* (tonight, 9 ET/PT). "I've heard him described as a cross between a game-show host and a used-car salesman because of the smile."

Wise's CEO Satan is a man of wealth and taste who demands results from slacker Sam (Bret Harrison), forced by contractual requirements regarding his soul to track down hell's escapees and return them to perdition.

"I see him as a person, if we can call the devil a person, with a great sense of humor and a wry, amusing take on mankind," Wise says. "But he can be ruthless. The devil insists you uphold the contract. And he throws in little acts of brutality now and then, just as a reminder."

He enjoys the scenes between the devil and Sam, whose parents sold his soul before birth, figuring they'd never have to pay up. The devil's "relationship with Sam is a complex one. Sometimes, he's a mentor. Sometimes, he's like a (fa-

ther) or a good friend or his boss."

A 37-year acting veteran, Wise, 60, can call on earlier roles for inspiration, notably the evil Bob, the twin personality who possessed his Leland Palmer in *Twin Peaks*. His Chad MacGregor, the campaign manager in Tim Robbins' *Bob Roberts*, provides dark matter, too.

In Fox's *24*, Wise's fifth-season vice president was a sinister red herring, steering viewer suspicions away from the real villain, President Charles Logan (Gregory Itzin). He also played troubled newsman Don Hollenbeck in George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck*.

Wise's smile dazzled *Reaper*'s executive producers, but they chose him over more than 100 actors for other reasons, too. "He's been scary and charming in the past. We hoped he'd be as funny as he was scary. When he came in and read, in the first few minutes we knew he was our guy," executive producer Tom Spezialy says. "We think of Ray as a scary Cary Grant with that smile. You're drawn to it, but you can't quite trust it."

Executive producer Tara Butters says the writers first had a bit of Alec Baldwin's smarmy, charming *30 Rock* boss in mind. "When (Ray) read the dialogue in the audition, it felt like it was written for him."

Although the devil is actually doing the world a service via Sam's bounty hunting, he will hardly be a saint, Butters says. "He will casually remind the audience that he's not someone to mess with," as a gory Zamboni accident in last week's



By Eric Ogden, CW

premiere showed.

As a tenor-baritone, Wise hopes one day his Satan will get to sing. "A lot of music pertains to the devil." The caterer on the set in Vancouver gets the cast and crew in the mood by playing obscure songs about the devil during lunch breaks.

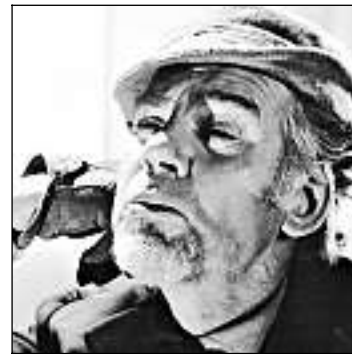
Mention the Charlie Daniels Band's *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*, in which Johnny out-fiddles the demon, and Wise defends his alter ego: "That would never really happen. Not in my world."

The evil that men do on screen

As a movie fan, Ray Wise is in touch with his demons. His take on a few of his favorite big-screen Beelzebubs and associated hellraisers:



By Murray Close, WB/Monarchy Enterprises
Evil incarnate in New York: Al Pacino as John "Lucifer" Milton.



Janus Films
Giving the devil his due: Walter Huston as soul collector.



Warner Home Video
One helluva wish-granter: Ray Walston transforms a Senator.

Movie: *The Devil's Advocate*, 1997
Actor: Al Pacino (as John Milton)
Satanic synopsis: Kevin Lomax (Keanu Reeves) may lose his soul while winning power, sex and money at a top New York law firm — the devil's workshop in cinematic shorthand — headed by the charming Milton.
Wise analysis: "He was extremely menacing. Certainly a valid representation."

Movie: *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, 1941
Actor: Walter Huston (as Mr. Scratch)
Satanic synopsis: When Huston's spiritual repo man comes to claim the soul of a poor farmer who made a deal with the devil to change his luck, he must match wits with orator Daniel Webster (Edward Arnold).
Wise analysis: "I loved his look. He just looked like he could be the devil. I may have that going for me, too. I feel there's kind of a mischievous quality. There's a little twinkle in the eye, and that goes hand in hand with the smile."

Movie: *Constantine*, 2005
Actor: Peter Stormare (as Satan)
Satanic synopsis: Is Keanu possessed? As supernatural detective John Constantine, Reeves battles Satan & Co. again in another famed devil's playground, Los Angeles. (In Fox's *Prison Break*, Stormare's Mob guy exchanged temporal damnation for the eternal kind.)
Wise analysis: "He was kind of a sleazy devil. I enjoyed that."

Movie: *The Prophecy*, 1997
Actor: Viggo Mortensen (as Lucifer)
Satanic synopsis: The Angel Gabriel (Christopher Walken) comes to Earth looking for a soul to resolve the war going on with the angelic host in heaven. Lucifer gets involved to protect his fiery dominion.
Wise analysis: "He was a very quiet, menacing devil, very soft-spoken, but could turn into fire and brimstone in the next second."

Movie: *Damn Yankees!* 1958
Actor: Ray Walston (as Mr. Applegate)
Satanic synopsis: Soul man redux. In this adaptation of the Broadway musical, an aging fan sells his soul to win a pennant for the Washington Senators, with the devil transforming him into a star player (Tab Hunter).
Wise analysis: "Ray Walston was a wonderful entertainer, a great musical comedy star and a good, good actor. He carried that on to *My Favorite Martian*, which I found had some elements of his devil in it because of his own personality."

Sources: IMDb.com; Leonard Maltin's *Movie & Video Guide*

'Carpoolers' crashes before getting out of the driveway

New show **Carpoolers**
ABC, tonight, 8:30 ET/PT
★ out of four

Is ABC trying to kill the sitcom? Granted, the decade hasn't exactly been a laugh-fest bonanza for anyone. But when it comes to complete comic futility, ABC is in a class of its own.

No ABC sitcom has ended the season in the Top 20 since *Dharma & Greg* in 2000, and none has been nominated for the best-comedy

TV preview
By Robert Bianco

Emmy since *Home Improvement* in 1994. It's as if ABC has decided to sit the century out.

The problem isn't just that ABC sitcoms fail; on TV, failure is the default position. It's that so many in the past few years have failed in the exact same way.

The network has developed an inexplicable affection for a particular kind of slice-of-dull-life filmed sitcom. Shows such as *Help Me Help You*, *Emily's Reasons Why Not*, *Big Day* or *In Case of Emergency* just meander along, occasionally wandering close to something funny but never quite getting there.

Say this for the network's unpremiered *Cavemen*: It may be lousy, but at least it will be different.

What links these shows beyond their failure to amuse is their level of artifice. In style, tone, plot and technique, they erect so many ab-



By Kare Neal, ABC

They live life in the fast lane: Tim Peper, left, and Jerry Minor are two of four carpoolers from very different backgrounds.

surd barriers between the characters and the audience, you need a jackhammer to break through.

Take *Carpoolers*, which has the titular carpoolers compete with a "fancy" carpool in which the commuters eat sushi. One of the guys has a big, dumb-lump son named Marmaduke who never wears pants.

Even if those jokes were funny — and they're not — they immediately take you out of the world the show is trying to create.

Not that we would want to be in that world in the first place. Stuck in a car with four ridiculously boring men, singing along to the radio as they drive? That's not a show, it's a threat.

As for those men, each is a more ridiculous "type" than the other. Gracen (Fred Goss, from one of ABC's more noble flops, *Sons and Daughters*) is a mediator who worries that his wife (Faith Ford) is getting the upper hand in their marriage, as indeed she is. Aubrey (Jerry Minor) is a soft-spoken, henpecked, African-American nerd (a variation on the much more amusing character from *Malcolm in the Middle*). Laird (Jerry O'Connell) is an overly confident ladies' man, and Dougie (Tim Peper) is the newlywed newbie.

Tonight, you're asked to believe the gang would break into Gracen's house and steal his toaster. Next week, you have to believe Gracen

would loan his wedding ring to Laird so he can pick up a woman who dates only married men.

But then, ABC also believes we'll watch this every week. And that labeling it a "man date" somehow

makes it more enticing. Goss is poorly used here, and O'Connell is pushing too hard.

But the trouble with *Carpoolers* goes way beyond a few strained performances or an ill-chosen

corporate style. The show is so painfully witless and dull, your daily commute may begin to seem entertaining in comparison.

That's great for us, I guess. For the sitcom, not so much.

Critics grunt, but here's 'Cavemen'

Just give the comedy a chance, show execs say

By Gary Strauss
USA TODAY

Cavemen could be stuck between a rock and a hard place.

The Geico ad campaign-turned-comedy premieres tonight (8 ET/PT, ABC). But it already has been blasted by critics for a muddled early pilot, the crossover from commercial into mainstream TV and an aura of racial insensitivity.

"It's been a witch hunt in the press," says co-director/producer Will Speck. "Corrupt commercialism infecting television, racism." Our intentions were pure. We just had so much fun with the commercials, we felt there were more stories to tell with these guys."

Cavemen centers on the everyday lives of two brothers and their friend who share an apartment in San Diego — normal in most life experiences, except for their lineage.

"There's a lot of assumptions about who they are and what they represent. It has nothing to do with race; that's silly," says executive producer Joe Lawson, who created



By Mitch Haddad, ABC

Geico-Magnon: Sam Huntington stars as Andy, a caveman who lives in modern-day America.

the ubiquitous Geico ad campaign and the tongue-in-cheek bias against Cro-Magnons living in a Homo sapien world.

"Our concept is that there are only about 2,000 of them. They've always been in the background. While they're a minority, their lives are like everyone else's," Lawson says.

Advance screeners of tonight's premiere episode weren't provided to critics. The show's original pilot, retooled somewhat, will air later in the season to allow the series to better introduce its characters.

"It wasn't about covering up bad

mistakes," Speck says of the switch. "We needed to step back and let the concept and characters' back story unfold."

Bill English stars as Joe, the button-down, responsible Cro-Magnon who eventually proposes to his Homo sapien girlfriend. "It's a fish-out-of-water story, but the issues we deal with as cavemen are the same that people of all races deal with," English says. "There are lots of opportunities for humor. You can put these guys in any situation. Doing the Electric Slide. In a grocery store. At the beach."

Cavemen was pitched to three networks. ABC and another, which Speck won't identify, bought into the concept. Yet as the show was being developed, "we went from winning a bunch of (ad industry) awards and favorable press to immediately getting slammed."

English says he's surprised at the animosity *Cavemen* raised. "I was amazed how seriously people took it," says English, who often spends up to four hours a day in makeup. "This is a comedy. It's not a documentary. We're not trying to change the world."

Speck hopes viewers will keep an open mind. "Just watch it," he says. "We hope it's funny enough for a lot of people. But if you want to hate it, hate it."

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