Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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It’s fitting that Joseph Kahn’s manic teen horror/comedy DETENTION (a world premiere at the current SXSW fest) contains a good bit of time travel, as the film itself often feels as if it’s satirizing a type of cinema that hasn’t exactly been made yet—that is, the kind of hyperstylized, tonally all-over-the-place art that will eventually come out of the current generation’s fascination with endless references and hashtag culture.

The movie centers on a group of high school students—mainly Riley (Shanley Caswell), the hapless and seemingly luckless heroine—and their trials and tribulations amidst ever-changing fashion and pop culture, the prom, boyfriends, a movie slasher seemingly come to life and the end of the world. While Kahn and co-writer Mark Palermo are most definitely poking fun with their nonstop barrage of references and banter, they’re also lovingly making an effort to create the feel of a real-deal contemporary teen film, and just what that means in 2011. For many with less pop-art-oriented tastes, that will mean an overwhelming sensory overload, but for those ingrained in smartphones and snark, it’ll ring fairly true. The four young stars and supporting cast of students all put in solid, delightful performances, especially Caswell, who’s funny and endearing as an almost female-John Cusack. Sadly, nothing can change the fact that Dane Cook is a grating presence, but thankfully his appearances are sporadic.

It can be wearisome to keep up with all that’s going on in DETENTION, and while some of its tangents lose a bit of the energy (despite the parade of flashing neon), its slasher elements feel right at home. When they hit, the kills are bloody fun, with solid FX on hand. Plus, the film’s brief mocking of current horror fads is a pretty hilarious and spot-on sendup.

Just as John Hughes flicks and cheeseball slashers allow us looks back at their respective times and places, DETENTION could very well be a signature picture of 2011—but, in being totally aware of the nonstop, ever-changing, flash-in-the-pan nature of current youth

preoccupations, only for a moment or so. It’s a film that should probably hit on-demand right now, since, in proper ’10s form, it will likely already be dated in another few months. DETENTION feels like it doesn’t necessarily hold together, but that doesn’t stop it from being a great watch. Its intentions are pure and it really swings for the fences. Hopefully, its intended audience will embrace it.

{jcomments on}