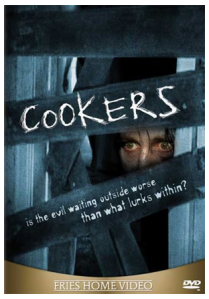
After Hector and Dorena rip off their crystal meth supplier, they hide out in an abandoned house to cook up the stolen product. But before they can finish their batch and run off to the Caribbean, they descend into a speed-fueled world of paranoia and insanity. Is the decrepit house haunted by the ghost of a murdered young girl? Are their delusions real and assassins are lurking in the woods? Or are Hector and Dorena victims of drug-induced hallucinations?

For some reason, COOKERS never received the exposure it deserved. Produced in 2001, it didn’t see the commercial light of day until a direct-to-DVD release in 2005 (on a disc that is now sadly out of print), which is shocking considering the festival acclaim it received. This writer’s only guess is that potential distributors were turned off by the film’s minimalism and subtleties. While it can be difficult to watch a movie that only features three characters in one location (especially when those actors are unknowns), in a tightly wound and effectively acted movie like COOKERS, the bare-bones style pulls the audience right into the story.



Brad Hunt (as the control freak Hector) and Cyia Batten (his punching-bag girlfriend Dorena) are both entirely believable as two addicts struggling with paranoia and their own madness. From his facial twitches to his rapid-fire monologues, Hunt creates a character who is both sympathetic and despicable. Rounding out the cast is Patrick McGaw as the bumbling Merle, who not only adds some comic relief with his mullet and redneck mentality, but also sets up additional conflict. The eerily creepy ghost story he tells sparks fear in both Hector and Dorena and either awakens a ghostly presence, or triggers meth-based hallucinations. Also, as his character develops, the possibility arises that maybe Merle isn’t as dim-witted as he appears.

The house also hovers in the foreground as a menacing fourth character. As Hector’s paranoia and terror grow, the place becomes a self-imposed prison. He blacks out and boards up the

windows, locking not only himself and Dorena inside, but also all of the negative energy. As the two lovers spin out of control, the claustrophobic feeling intensifies, and even though there are definitely stretches where nothing seems to happen, the sense of dread is always present.

Director Dan Mintz does a tremendous job guiding the performances and creates a stylistically memorable movie. While not as jarring as similar films such as SESSION 9 and DEAD BIRDS, COOKERS is equally compelling. It isn’t really what you see on the screen that scares you, it’s where the film takes you. As the characters’ tension and the anxiety boil over, their worst fears manifest in different and shocking ways. Everything somewhat comes together in an open-ended climax, and regardless of your interpretation of it, the payoff is more than satisfying. While not the traditional ghost story, COOKERS is definitely worth checking out.

{jcomments on}