

Christian T. Escobar, CINEZINE, Nov. 20, 2020

A few minutes into writer-director Peter Hall's debut film, it is clear that he's not interested in the traditional portrayal of an angst-ridden teenager. Opting not to go with an alterna-pop soundtrack and ridiculously poor attempts at psychobabble, Hall instead infuses his film with a deep undercurrent of emotional conflict, familial dysfunction, and deep-seeded anger that fuels the Indie drama into a tense, dream-like state.

Tim (Desmond Devenish) is failing the tenth grade. He was once a bright student with a bright future, but a year ago things went terribly wrong. His mother committed suicide and his father Ben (Jeff Paul) is who Tim feels is responsible. Ben is a drunk, racist jerk, newly ordained with a Police badge in a backwater upstate New York town. The job may allow the father and son to get out of their run-down trailer and back on their feet. That is, unless the wall of emotional disconnection between the two doesn't crumble, allowing for a violent eruption. Meanwhile Tim has immersed himself in the life of Tracy DeLors (Shawn Batten), a peer whose family has a summerhouse in the same town. The house is empty at the moment, but that doesn't stop Tim from investigating every square inch. The tension builds as an impending showdown becomes all the more certain and the outcome all the more surreal.

Delinquent, for all its power, is an awfully quiet film. At times the dialogue is scant and the only sounds heard are from the electrically charged score provided by Gang of Four. But this plays into the building of the film's tense and brooding atmosphere. The film's driving and pulsing mentality - powered in part by that terrific score - is an intriguing contrast to the sleepy setting of the film.

Desmond Devenish quiet approach works well. His character isn't simply defined so it is up to him to work the edges of his role to fashion a connection. Jeff Paul walks the tightrope between dangerous and aggressive. He successfully brings a negative energy to the film. Shawn Betten, whose small role provides a major sub-plot, gives a fine turn. Marisa Townshend tactfully plays Mrs. Richman, a former schoolteacher of Tim's who befriends the boy. She is friend, mother and sexual fantasy all wrapped up in and one.

Delinquent is a dark rhapsody of some of our murkiest demons. Hall addresses a myriad of issues not with a hammer but with a delicate brush, slowly painting a window into the dysfunctional world of three human beings, all of whom are searching for something better. With adeptly placed dream sequences and a fearless and bold narrative, Hall creates a picture-perfect world of disillusionment and despair. It is a sullen and satisfying portrait of the dimmest parts of our soul.