

Comments on *The Lost* (2005)

Writer/Producer/Director: Chris Sivertson

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This movie, based on the Jack Ketchum novel, begins with an overdone horror setup: teens in the woods. But it has a deeper, darker intent as a portrait of lethally insecure 19-year-old motel manager RAY PYE. When he suggests shooting two GIRLS he's been leering to horrified, sort-of girlfriend JENNIFER and pal TIM—and promptly does—it becomes clear that this won't be a conventional “who's the killer?” romp.

Other early surprises—the escape of one girl and the narrative's leap four years into the future—expand the story's emotional and psychological horizons. We meet and actually linger with the people these murders have affected, including determined middle-aged DETECTIVE CHARLIE SCHILLING, who has always suspected but never been able to prove Ray's guilt. His deceptively chummy, I-know-what-you-did encounters with Ray keep the tension simmering and make their final showdown inevitable.

But this is no procedural. Most of the film follows Ray's attempts to pick up or date girls, futilely so with girl-next-door-ish motel maid SALLY and successfully so with the languid KATHERINE, who hides her own demons. There's a lot of sex and drugs, as there tends to be in movies about disturbed youths. Though those moments can border on gratuitous, they do support the story's portrayal of Ray, for whom even a failed party represents abject humiliation.

The performances are generally effective. Standouts include Jennifer, Sally and Schilling. As Ray, Marc Senter is at times cartoonishly psychotic (*Psycho* allusions abound), especially when he's behind a gun or cooing amid carnage. But his pale face and mascara-lined eyes convey mood shifts with frightening clarity, and the glimpses of his frailties are convincing.

The direction has its flaws. The music is evocative, especially when scored, but it's overused and often overpowering. The lighting can be dim (a disservice to the actors), some visual tricks seem forced and the film would be more focused if shorter (tighter montages would help).

That said, the sound is sharp and adds to the jumpiness factor. Ray's final rampage is horrific and unbearably intense, less for the gore (though there's plenty) than the awfulness of bad things suddenly happening to innocent people.

I was expecting a “scary” film. It's more than that; it's interesting, potent and deeply unsettling. Did I enjoy it? Not really. Did it affect me? Strongly. Do I think it's a good movie? After distancing myself from that brutal finale...a qualified yes.