

Joseph Kahn's Self-Funded Josh Hutcherson Indie 'Detention' Deserves Cult-Hit Status

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Don't be duped by Joseph Kahn's insultingly unintelligent trailer for his new ADHD high school slasher/comedy "Detention". Rather than prematurely blowing his load with the film's crème de la crème in a two-minute trailer, he's done the reverse. Kahn – who scraped much of this "indie" film's \$10 million budget from his own pockets – has set up disappointed trailer watchers to discover a hidden gem in his second feature-length film.

Kahn's fast-paced, Aaron Sorkin-like "Detention" deserves cult-hit status. Just as "The Social Network" embodies our Facebook culture, this SXSW film-festival favorite rewrites today's high school movie bible.



Josh Hutcherson in "Detention".

Image credit: Detention Films

Despite what this film's sophomoric trailer might lead you to believe, "Detention" is anything but tenderfoot and witless. And don't be nauseated by the disenchanting storyline of a killer named Cinderhella stalking the high school student body while a gaggle of co-eds Voltron together and serve "The Breakfast Club"-esque detention to survive. Rather, its brilliance is its guise of tomfoolery. While Kahn is a newcomer to the Hollywood rodeo of feature film, he's shrewdly riding his first producer credit like a bull with the unfair advantage of a fifth leg.

Kahn isn't to be critically thrashed by paying out and cashing in one of the hottest new 20-year-old boys in Hollywood today: Josh Hutcherson. It's 0 percent coincidence and 100 percent deliberate that "Detention" is riding the current launching pad that is Hutcherson's current worldwide acclaim exactly three weeks following the release of worldwide hit "The Hunger Games," which has already devoured \$472 million globally.



"Detention" writer, producer and director Joseph Kahn.

Image credit: Detention Films

Kahn – who won a Grammy for Eminem's "Without Me" music video and has done videos for Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, Beyonce, U2 and on and on – hasn't whored out Hutcherson in a cheap bordello merely to pay the bills. Try putting nearly \$10 million of your own wherewithal within a single film without a smoking ace to help you and your studio make its money back. Even if the commercial concept of this casting choice offends you, you'd still laud Kahn for casting a guy who's able to epitomize the humor, humanity and suave naiveté of the high school hero.

Kahn piggybacking on Hutcherson's fame and fortune isn't disingenuous profiteering. It's sound investing in his apocalyptic, body-swapping, time-traveling, teenage-comedy investment through cinematic *and* business sense.



"Detention" stars Josh Hutcherson, Spencer Locke, Shanley Caswell and Aaron David Johnson.

Image credit: Detention Films

Along with Dane Cook as the school's principal, Hutcherson as Clapton Davis leads a posse of relatively talented newcomers and unknowns.

Watch specifically for what Shanley Caswell – who plays the quick-witted, PETA-friendly vegetarian known as Riley Jones – does next. This girl next door addictively keeps your attention even though you're not quite sure why. Shanley as Riley reminds me of the high school debate star Anna Kendrick in "Rocket Science" who's always got something smart to say before you have a chance to refute it.

Spencer Locke as the dumb blonde teen bombshell Ione is a confusing mixture of a cheesy Alicia "Clueless" Silverstone who also plays the sexy but scatterbrained part like she should.



"Detention" star Dane Cook.

Image credit: Samuel Goldwyn Pictures

Now depending on how you do or don't party in your life, the acid trip that is "Detention" may either tenderly suckle you close or grievously plummet you down Kahn's preternatural rabbit hole. But where "Detention" differs from cheesy "Scream" slasher flicks is in its drugs – either that Kahn was on when he inked this script or the hallucinogens you might think you just rolled yourself. Kahn's "Detention" script, by the way, overtly sneers at "Scream" and even says love interest Clapton with cheerleader Ione "makes as much sense as that stupid movie 'Torque'". ("Torque" in 2004 was Kahn's debut feature film.)

"Detention" certainly lacks focus, eccentrically digresses wildly and should have edited out some out-there evolutions. Despite enjoyably sometimes infracting the fourth wall, the red tape was most needed on the reveal that Parker Bagley as high school bully Billy Nolan is actually a... fly? Yes, he spits acid and uncontrollably has sticky hands on the football field and locker room. Back to the cutting room for the "Weird Science" fly guy, please. Still, Kahn's fearlessness and obsession to push the boundaries of high school conventions and teen films from a couple decades ago should ultimately be respected.



“Detention” star Shanley Caswell.
Image credit: Samuel Goldwyn Pictures

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Cut through the divisive response to “Detention” and give yourself the chance to love it or hate it. Paced swiftly, intelligently and digestibly for today’s 140-character text-messaging culture, you might just find yourself admitting that 1992 was the bomb dot-com and you miss it dearly. In time, even many of Kahn’s haters may give his expensive baby a first or second go when it earns the cult following it deserves.

“Detention” stars Josh Hutcherson (also an executive producer), Dane Cook, Shanley Caswell, Spencer Locke, Brooke Haven, Aaron Perilo, Will Wallace, Jesse Heiman, James Black, Parker Bagley, Carrie Wiita, Walter Perez, Nicolo Dorian, Richard Brake and Lindsey Morgan from writer, producer and director Joseph Kahn and writer Mark Palermo. The film, which has a running time of 89 minutes, is rated “R” for bloody violence, crude and sexual content, nudity, language, some teen drinking and drug use. “Detention” opened on April 13, 2012.



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