



CUT OFF (ABGESCHNITTEN)

Adapted from the novel of the same title, the German film is directed by *Antibodies* filmmaker Christian Alvart. Blending true-crime framework with slasher tropes and elements of *Saw*, Alvart masterfully adapts the novel, never allowing you to get your balance and never letting you go. *Cut Off* tells the story of a coroner/father named Paul, who has grown apart from his daughter. After having a failed lunch, she is kidnapped out in the open. Paul returns to work and finds a corpse with a capsule in its head that contains his daughter's name and a phone number. He becomes consumed with finding her no matter what. Obsessed with the mysterious figure on the other line of the phone that has his daughter, Paul gets help from a young woman who is trying to escape her own dark past. As the duo moves through the spider web of clues, deceit, and a winter storm, they will discover that none of these horrors are what they seem.

I had the opportunity to see *Cut Off* at BIFFF in a large theater. Hooked from the first moment, *Cut Off* is the thriller that most filmmakers are afraid to make. Blending mystery, beats of humor, and an expected visual brutality, *Cut Off* features captivating and layered characters. Interweaving multiple locations, clues, and fitting story arcs, the pace and flow of the overall narrative never feel slow or unbalanced. The practical FX in *Cut Off* are resourceful, well crafted, and disturbing. The variety of locations set a tone and the cinematography establishes an unrelenting POV. *Cut Off* is one of the best genre hybrids of 2019 and is worth seeing in a theater! 🍷



by Jay Kay

MURDER MADE EASY

The playfully wicked debut feature film from editor-turned-filmmaker David Palamaro is not just nostalgically entertaining but has a dark edge influenced by masters like Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock. Focusing on a series of dinners that turn deadly, *Murder Made Easy* tells the story of widow Joan (Jessica Graham) and her dead husband's best friend, Michael (Chris Soren Kelly), who are killing off a group of their friends who suspect foul play. As we see the variety of dinners unfold, nothing is as it seems. *Murder Made Easy* is a swift and clever thriller. Feeling as though it was adapted from a stage play, Palamaro and co-writer Tim Davis create dialog that is both sharp, funny, and venomous. The film's ensemble brings a uniqueness to the characters that makes each act both different and entertaining. A bit over the top at times, the cast brings their own touches to what could have been flat characters.

The camera work is quite good in such a limited set of locations. Taking place in one home, the DP Sherri Kauk and Palamaro, block each act wonderfully with the intent of using the mind of the viewer to their full advantage. The pace of *Murder Made Easy* begins gentle and playful but escalates as the guest list whittles down. With each murder, we see the darkness of the two leads revealed before culminating in the final act. The ending of this film not only feels satisfying but Palamaro allows something that feels nostalgic, to cross into a thought-provoking and dark area. This surprises and challenges the viewer. If you love bloodshed, you will be disappointed.



by Jay Kay

However, the final act adds a grizzly and desperate element that pays you back in the most satisfying of ways. 🍷

COME TO DADDY

The debut feature from producer-turned-filmmaker Ant Timpson is a bare-bones, dysfunctional family story. Starring Elijah Wood, Stephen McHattie, and Martin Donovan, *Come to Daddy* tells the story of Norvel (Woods), who is returning home to reconnect with his father (McHattie) after many years away. Like any dark comedy/thriller, things are not what they seem once Norvel and his father connect. Lies, secrets, and murder ensue during Norvel's homecoming which shakes the very foundation of who he thought he was. Inspired by aspects of Timpson's upbringing, the story feels uncomfortable and strange from the moment Norvel gets off the bus and walks towards the isolated beach home. The film's foundation is isolation and deceit. While it does have moments where you not only connect with Norvel and feel the struggle he goes through, Timpson never allows that to last more than a sequence or so before he sends a shock to the system of the viewer.

Going through this bizarre family reunion and coming-of-age piece of storytelling, Timpson escalates the violence as events unfold and questions are answered. It creates a palpable tension that Norvel becomes wrapped into. *Come to Daddy* features some impactful sound and great cinematography. DP Daniel Katz uses lens and lighting as a weapon to put the viewer through the mill by time the final credits roll. For horror fans, the kills have an element of comedic execution and brutal intent. Part mystery, part thriller part throwback cinema, *Come to Daddy* is one of the surprises of the genre film-fest year. 🍷



by Jay Kay