Divination

98 Minutes

Rating: ****

We’re going through the late summer doldrums at the box office, and Hollywood hasn’t given us much worth watching the past few weeks. This weekend was no exception. Fortunately, we live in the era of home video, and sometimes the best new releases are to be found not at your local cinema but the nearest Redbox.

Case in point: DIVINATION.

DIVINATION is a supernatural thriller about the unseen spiritual warfare that is constantly raging all around us, whether we want to admit it or not. Newlyweds Jason and Jessica certainly aren’t privy to the otherworldly battle that is taking place inside their home, nor to the efforts of their guardian angel, Joshua, to keep the forces of evil at bay. All the young couple wants to do is build a happy life together and start a family. But Jason is harboring a dark secret that is eating away at his psyche like a cancer, and all the while unseen powers are unfurling evil plans for not only the man and his wife, but for their potential children as well.

DIVINATION is one of those movies that flies in under the radar and then goes off like an atomic bomb. I had never heard of it prior to its September Redbox debut, but while it may be an unheralded film the lack of fanfare makes it all the more impressive. No, the cast doesn’t feature any “name” actors, it’s apparently director Ben Pohl’s first feature, and it’s fairly obvious the movie was produced on a small budget. None of that matters. The acting is solid from everyone involved, and the performers do a great job of living out the script. As for the screenplay, it’s simply excellent. The story wrestles with common, everyday issues like familial trust, commitment, failure, and fear, but reminds us all that even our most mundane decisions can have eternal consequences not only for ourselves but for those we love. Dialog is spot-on and imminently believable. And first-time director Pohl proves himself surprisingly adept at dramatic storytelling and atmosphere. There are some really stunning set pieces and more than a few shocking moments. While DIVINATION isn’t really a horror story, there are some genuinely frightening scenes, though Pohl is thankfully smart enough to pull back before the chills overwhelm the rest of the plot.

The only real weakness in the movie is evident in its action scenes. While Pohl does a great job of framing the several duels between angels and demons in a stunning ethereal ambience, the actual action choreography is at times a little rough around the edges. One gets the impression Pohl wants his action scenes to look like similar moments from THE MATRIX, but given the low budget that’s just not possible. Still, this is a minor quibble, and overall the production values—including the special effects—are quite good, especially considering the obvious financial limitations.

DIVINATION is a terrific and highly inspirational film that is frankly one of the best movies of 2013, low profile notwithstanding. Its script is insightful and full of Judeo-Christian imagery, and while Jesus Christ is never specifically mentioned there is a major plot point that clearly symbolizes the Son of God (you’ll know it when you see it). The cast all play their roles with sincerity and conviction, and the direction is creative and rises above its low budget. DIVINATION is one of those films that will not only entertain you, but perhaps make you take certain aspects of your life a little more seriously. Our decisions matter, and Good and Evil are not only real, but a part of our daily lives. How we react to that is—as for Jason and Jessica—up to us.