

✓ **Cold in July (15) USA, France 2014**

23 April 2018

DIRECTOR: **Jim Mickle**

Running time: 109 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Michael C. Hall** (Dane), **Sam Shepard** (Russell), **Don Johnson** (Jim Bob), **Nick Damici** (Price), **Tim Lajcik** (Mex), **Gregory Russell Cook** (Skinny man).

SCREENPLAY: **Nick Damici** and **Jim Mickle** based on the noel by **Joe R. Lansdale**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Ryan Samul**. EDITING: **John Paul Horstmann** and **Jim Mickle**. MUSIC: **Jeff Grace**.

Cold in July is a thriller in the modern mould, one which combines classic situations with an amorality and reversal of expectations born of the post-Watergate world.

The set-up is as follows: small-town picture framer Dane (Hall) surprises an intruder and shoots him dead. The sheriff congratulates him on ‘offing’ so thoroughgoing a reprobate jailbird and recidivist as the deceased, Freddy Russell, is touted to be. Then, oh dear, enter stage left the hapless burglar’s dad (Sam Shepard), a somewhat ornery piece of work who will happily eat the likes of Dane for breakfast, and looks as though he would crush his skull with his bare hands.

This scenario out of *Cape Fear* via *The Desperate Hours*, in which more or less innocent paterfamilias has to defend his kin from vengeful cons, we are accustomed to seeing in the hands of Fredric March, Gregory Peck, or even Dustin Hoffman, rather than a callow second-ranker like Hall, who is clearly outclassed in the charisma stakes by his co-stars.

Sure enough, there is a twist in the offing when it transpires that the police are more than happy to see the back of Russell Junior, who knew far too much about a snuff pornography racket in which they are embroiled. Dane and Russell Senior soon find themselves working together for survival against larger – and darker – forces, and one is suddenly reminded of post-Watergate thrillers, such as *The Parallax View* and their more recent descendants, in which maverick individualism must prevail against the suited and booted authorities.

However, as former private dick turned pig farmer, Jim Bob (Don Johnson), joins the fray sporting a cowboy hat (the setting is east Texas), and we tool up for a showdown that owes as much to *The Wild*

Bunch as it does to *Taxi Driver*, one can see that *Cold in July*’s generic borrowings are manifold.

Which brings us back to my opening gambit, and let us acknowledge that the film plays on what we bring to the table in terms of thrillers past and present. But what, if anything, new do we take away? Well, provided you do not make the mistake of dismissing characters as unpleasant and irredeemable, simply because they cuss a lot, shoot first, ask questions later and you would not necessarily have them round to tea, quite a bit. To begin with, these men are clearly out of their depth at the sickness of the society they inhabit, and Dane, at least, is affected by the violence he commits.

After that, you are left with the very Western feature that they stick together and watch each other’s backs, plus they are a heck of a lot better than the bad guys. Not much, I know, but in a post-Trump world one must hang onto what certainties one can.

David Clare

Darkroom UK (2016), directed by Leonard Kitts.
Running time: 10 minutes.

A psychological thriller, featuring haunted and haunting photography and a sneaky *ménage à trois*. This is a final year project from one of the students on the University of Suffolk BA course in Digital Film Production.

Ipswich Film Society 2017 – 2018 Season