

# 'The River's Edge'

## Movie provides disturbing look at high school drug abuse

The opening credits for "The River's Edge" will remind you of late-night "snow" on your television set. They are in shades of black and white, which lends a newsreel feel to the picture of a wide and glinting river, where a strange and chilling crime has taken place. The opening track is an eerie prep for what will prove

**Tricia White**

**Cinema**

to be an unusually unnerving movie.

I sat in my chair in the theater knowing, as some people will, that

the plot of "The River's Edge" was taken from an obscure news story from California that was released in the early 1980s. However, I was not prepared to be drawn into the inescapable matrix that caused a large group of teenagers to protect a friend from arrest. Their friend, who has been involved in drug abuse — primarily of marijuana — has killed his girlfriend. We see an extended closeup of the dead girl, who also used drugs. She has short nails, with the exception of an almost gruesomely oversized and discolored thumbnail, which we might assume she employed to snort substances far more dangerous than marijuana.

It is the abuse of both street drugs and illegally consumed alcohol that underlies the plot of this movie and undermines the security of this particular group of otherwise not atypical high school kids.

More disturbing than this fact, however, is the zombie-like reaction of this large group of high school kids to the murder of one of their friends by another. The murderer, an obese and apathetic boy, describes the crime in an

unaffected manner, as if he is uninterested with whatever effect he might cause: "She was talking s - -," he says, as if to justify himself. Played very effectively by Daniel Roebuck, "John," as he is called by his friends — short for toilet, in this case — continues later, "I strangled her. . . . But she was dead and I was so . . . alive . . ." Perhaps it is the first time that John has felt alive in a long time.

Since the recent findings concerning drugs and alcohol have indicated that their abuse can cause a lethargic and apathetic attitude, it seems not surprising that for these kids, who have grown up with drugs, this kind of I-could-not-care-less-and-no-one-else-should-either attitude is the norm.

Peer pressure, no matter how old you are, can be an extraordinarily persuasive influence. Drug and alcohol abuse, including "recreational use," buying, selling, pushing and overdosing are increasingly disturbing phenomena in America, as well as other countries. Yet in the end it is left up to the individual to decide,

whether under pressure or not, to walk away from the heat. "The River's Edge" is an excellent description of this fact.

"The River's Edge" has excellent ensemble acting, generally speaking. Dennis Hopper (Hoosiers, Blue Velvet) is especially good as a low-key psycho. However, I think Crispin Glover (George McFly in "Back to the Future") put in a performance that, while effective, was still too much like Ally Sheedy on speed for my comfort.

"River's Edge" is, in my opinion, one of those few and far between must-see films. It is currently showing at the Center Theater at Lakewood Shopping Center in Durham.

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underestimated brother (Ed Smith of Raleigh) Owen Musser, the KKK connection (Ken Kasriel of Chapel Hill) and Betty the proprietress (Elaine Croker of Chapel Hill) complete the cast.

On July 29, The New Theater Company will open "Retreat," a new drama by North Carolina playwright Phil Hines, which will also run Wednesday through Saturday for two weeks.

Tickets for "The Foreigner" are \$7 for Friends of The ArtsCenter and \$8 for the public, with a discount offered on purchase of tickets to both plays. Call 929-2896 for information or to charge tickets.



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