

## "PIRANHA 3D" (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
Friday, 20 August 2010 10:27

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So here's what's up: PREDATORS was merely OK, and THE EXPENDABLES was a goofy piece of crap. The two summer films that promised genre fans guilt-free, explosion-laden, over-the-top violence ended up letting us down, basically saying we would've been better off at home with burritos watching DEAD ALIVE and COMMANDO again. And now it's come to this: the fate of summer 2010 and its ability to satisfy the bloodlust of a nation of fright fans rests on the shoulders of a film about savage, prehistoric piranha and their full force assault on spring break. Get excited.

Why? Well, firstly, PIRANHA 3D opens with a cameo by Richard Dreyfuss. And, really, in a film this gory and boisterous, the fact that Richard Dreyfuss is the first person you see should be all you need to know about getting your ass in a seat. Especially considering the fact that he's denim-clad, drinking Amity beer, singing "Show Me the Way to Go Home" and going by the name of Matt. After his grand entrance (and exit), the film gets going, firmly planting us in spring break party central, Lake Victoria, as Sheriff Julie Forester (Elisabeth Shue) is getting ready for the onslaught of drunk bros and their skank counterparts. Her son Jake (Steven R. McQueen) is charged with the lame task of babysitting while the rest of his town thrashes with scantily clad women. He ditches his younger siblings, however, upon meeting the rich, coked up Derrick Jones (Jerry O'Connell), who runs Wild Wild Girls (the film's take on Girls Gone Wild) and secures a job as their local guide. Meanwhile, Sheriff Forester and her deputies are escorting seismologist Novak (PARTY DOWN's brilliant Adam Scott) and his team to investigate the earthquake beneath the lake that opened the doors for the furious fish.

What's most to love about Alexandre Aja's first foray into horror-comedy is that most people will go in expecting a film made to be an exercise in camp and "so-bad-it's-good," when it's actually a film made to be an exercise in fun. Is it silly? Over-the-top? Ridiculous, even? Of course, but that doesn't stop it from being well-made, well-cast and it completely avoids sacrificing quality (a wonderful contrast to something like THE EXPENDABLES, which was an ugly- and grainy-looking film, and didn't elicit a good performance from anyone in its cast.) The performers in PIRANHA know the score, but not in a "wink-wink, look at how low I've stooped" kind of way. Instead, they help to create a good time amidst great looking landscapes and some wonderfully composed shots (one pan-out in particular) that hark back to the cinema of the late '70s and early '80s. It's clear Aja knows exactly what he's doing here. He starts the film on a high note, but not so high that it can't be topped. And because the kills, action and even nudity all build on each other, with each setpiece bigger than the last, PIRANHA 3D doesn't wear out its welcome

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or burn out too early.



And Aja's not the only person doing standout work here. The practical FX on display from Gregory Nicotero and Howard Berger are wonderful at creating multiple "Holy shit!" moments. I smiled very wide as the midnight audience yelled out, clapped, laughed and was generally wowed by much of the gore on display. And yes, the big wet T-shirt ambush is just as awesome as you've heard. But it's not even that huge chunk that's most memorable. It's some of the smaller individual kills that really shine, like when a hang-gliding tourist comes out of the water without a bottom half, or when a character's legs are completely ripped to the bone. The detail and excellence Nicotero and Berger showcase really makes these bits work.

The cast, as stated earlier, is also note-perfect. Scott steps up to the badass plate pumping a shotgun with one hand and shooting piranha from a speeding jet ski. O'Connell is hilarious as the sleazy Joe Francis-type. And even stunning British model Kelly Brook, who is clearly in the film for eye candy purposes, gets some nice charming moments. And, as if you didn't expect him to, Christopher Lloyd makes his limited screen time count like no other. Jake and his love interest Kelly (Jessica Sozhr) aren't the most original of characters, basically playing younguns in peril, but they both manage to make it work and, like Brook, have some good scenes—most notably the 3D vomit.

Sadly, PIRANHA 3D races by, and aside from wanting more, you'll definitely get the feeling there was a good deal that you didn't get to see (like the fate of one character in particular). And technically, while the 3-D is fun and does well in adding to the proceedings, it's also obvious it was post-conversion and hinders some of the darker images in the movie that could have looked much cooler had they reached their full potential (mainly the exploration of the underwater cave).

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It may be an overused word these days, but the easiest way to describe Aja's nuts film is awesome. Aside from everything it has going for it, PIRANHA 3D does a great job of creating a communal theater-going experience, a rowdy bond between you and fellow audience members lapping up the blood, boobs and silly Eli Roth guest appearance. So drink some beers, grab some friends and go enjoy the most entertaining horror movie this year.



{jcomments on}