

## “DRIVE ANGRY” (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
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While an incredibly fun and original genre movie is very, very welcome in the midst of this particularly dim winter for wide releases, here's the shame of it: Late this April, "summer" will kick off with the fifth entry of a tired and often obnoxiously dumb series built around fast cars. Really, there's only the slimmest of chances it's better than Patrick Lussier and Todd Farmer's 3D revenge road movie, which is much more befitting of signifying the beginning of hot weather, short shorts and sweet times.

To know DRIVE ANGRY is to love it. It's brief opening narration from William Fichtner's *The Accountant* (who steals the film) musing on the fates of bad-ass motherf\*\*kers sets a stage built on pyrotechnics and the bones of lesser men. The film very much stars Nicolas Cage as John Milton, who after escaping hell is on a singular mission to eradicate the cult leader (Billy Burke as Jonah King) who murdered his daughter and stole her baby. He finds feisty companionship in ex-waitress Piper (Amber Heard) as they charge towards the site of the infant's sacrifice under the full moon, with many misadventures along the way.



The strengths of DRIVE ANGRY are many, and surprisingly enough, the third dimension holds fast among them. Lussier did a blast of a job with *MY BLOODY VALENTINE* and has only improved since. The director has very little qualms exploiting the primary value of 3D (its use as a fun-enhancing tool), and because he's having a good time with the process, he manages to add noteworthy stylistic flourishes throughout, like the translucency of Milton and Jonah's faces in one flashback sequence and numerous reminders of the full moon looming.

Lussier and Farmer have created nothing but solid (and comprehensible!) action. The Southern-fried crashes, explosions and gunfights never peter out and escalate nicely. While it's surely an over-the-top affair, DRIVE ANGRY doesn't reach its heights too early on, saving the best (and boy, the final showdown and its repercussions are out of control) for last. And while

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clearly influenced by *RACE WITH THE DEVIL* and other drive-in classics, Lussier thankfully doesn't shoot for a *faux*-grindhouse aesthetic, crafting a well-made film all its own instead of one that constantly calls back to its sources and influences.

As mentioned above, no one beats Fichtner. His portrayal of Satan's right-hand man, relishing his time on Earth and sent to bring back a man who's gotten out, is a ball of beautifully timed energy. In fact, most of the cast is popping. Heard's Piper is composed of spunk and good will, and watching her kick ass is a legitimate pleasure. Meanwhile, Burke is fierce as the leather-pants-wearing supposed savior, and a particular line about the dark lord's opinions on those who sacrifice in his name suggests a hint of subtext that Lussier and Farmer might be pointing straight at misguided religious groups. It may be disappointing for some to find out that Cage never bowls over into his infamous screaming hysterics, but the fact is, John Milton is a cool-headed bad-ass with a quiet rage, one that's dealt out through bullets, rather than bellows. There are plenty of fun small supporting turns as well, from Tom Atkins (!) to *EASTBOUND & DOWN*'s Katy Mixon to co-writer Farmer himself. Unfortunately, David Morse is on hand for mostly expositional purposes and doesn't exactly get to hop on the savagery train.

If a bit episodic, which many road-driven films tend to be, *DRIVE ANGRY* never slows down. It really is a solid, worthy trip to the cinema, and one that washes away the bad taste of recent weeks' offerings and gives a large, rowdy audience (which the film is tailor-made for) a swift kick in the ass.



{jcomments on}