

“AREA 407” (Movie Review)

Written by Bekah McKendry
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I wanted to like this film. While many critics have become tired of the found-footage style of filmmaking, I've been a loud supporter, championing the intelligence behind this often overused approach. Though I may have become a bit nauseous from watching shaky footage, I've rarely become sick of it, always discovering some new, smart technique the filmmakers implemented to convey an organic feel.

I cheered for [REC], I loved CHRONICLE and THE RIVER made the top of my TV viewing list last season. But after viewing AREA 407 (currently in select theaters and available on-demand from IFC), directed by Dale Fabrigar and Everette Wallin, I'm ready to make a general announcement to the film community: "OK, everyone. You have made some topnotch found-footage movies. Stellar work! Now, let's move on." If only I could have made this announcement before AREA 407.



A group of assorted stereotypical and incredibly flat characters are on a plane traveling from New York City to Los Angeles on New Year's Eve. There's the fat, belligerent man who keeps eating potato chips, the cute cuddling lovebird couple, the swarthy photojournalist guy returning from the Middle East and our perky camera-wielding protagonist, a teenager traveling with her sister who has just graduated from college. Really, that's where all character development stops, in favor of painfully shaky, out-of-focus, blurry motion. The plane crashes, and a few

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survivors struggle out of the rubble, arguing about what to do next. Any good Boy Scout (or MAN VS. WILD fan) knows you should build a fire first, but this group feels more comfortable wandering around the fields and forest, being picked off one by one by some mysterious large animal. And this is how the movie continues for the next hour and 30 minutes.

If you want to make a found-footage film, you have to have your characters behave as they would in real life. This theory is absent from AREA 407, which can be summed up in two lines which are repeated endlessly throughout its duration: “What was that sound?” and “Did you see that?” Characters are constantly pointing off into unseen areas, questioning strange sounds or rustling leaves. Too bad the camera/audience are never pointed that way! Even after a huge crashing sound occurs just offscreen, the camera never leaves the characters who are freaking out about the scary noise. In real life, the cameraperson would have turned toward the epic cacophony as well, not just staying focused on the victims to get an adequate capturing of everyone’s acknowledgement that something much more exciting is happening just out of frame. Because of this constant tactic, the audience never sees anything happen; AREA 407 is built entirely out of secondary reaction shots.

The filmmakers try to compensate for the lack of characterization and plot with blood spillage—not that the viewer ever sees any of the blood actually spilled. The characters emerge from the plane crash covered and dripping gooey fake redness. An hour later, they are still wet and dripping, making me wonder why these people did not just keel over from their endlessly leaking head wounds an hour before. Maybe then they would have held the camera still for five seconds.

Ultimately, AREA 407 is a snoozefest, despite the terrific first 15 minutes. The plane crash is awesome, exploiting a base fear we have all experienced at 30,000 feet, being tossed around by unseen forces. I also liked the last 20 seconds, with a final twist that made me a little happy to see a highly unused monster make a return to the screen. Too bad its comeback had to happen in such a painful movie.

