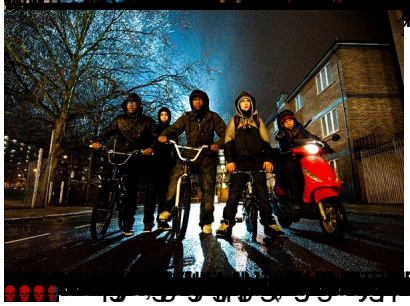
Written by Ariel Esteban Cayer
Monday, 18 July 2011 00:40

Today, I was reminded of how some films are just tailor-made for a Fantasia crowd. I can see how that is often understood pejoratively, and usually implicates excess with very little substance, but I believe there are two kinds of these films. The bad “crowd-pleaser” often dabbles in excesses of what genre audiences want to see, while ignoring that there needs to be meat for it to be bleeding. Such films tend to show a limited understanding of their genre’s formula, as well as exhibit a bare-bones simplification of their audience’s desires, while the good “crowd” films usually find a way to masterfully balance premium storytelling with perfect knowledge (and occasional subversion!) of genre tropes, mixed with a healthy dose of bombastic entertainment. ATTACK THE BLOCK and preceding Canadian short film THE LEGEND OF BEAVER DAM are of the latter category, offering perfect contrast with DEADBALL, which was also playing that evening and will be tackled in Part Two of this write-up.

Preceding ATTACK THE BLOCK, which the packed house enthusiasm had me anticipating more and more every minute, Mitch Davis took the mike to introduce his “favorite Canadian short film since TREEVENGE.” Considering Jason Eisener’s TREEVENGE is one of my favorite 15 minutes of entertainment as well, BEAVER DAM had a lot to live up to; And it did not disappoint. Montreal composers/writers Jerome Sable (who also directed) & Eli Batalion’s camp-side musical has a lot to offer, from its rocking soundtrack to its highly satisfying use of slasher motifs. Evocative of Jon Knautz’s JACK BROOKS: MONSTER SLAYER or Adam Green’s HATCHET in its practical use of gore FX artistry, atmosphere and spot-on humor, BEAVER DAM stands apart from its neo-slasher counterparts with its great cast of (singing!) children, hysteric crescendo structure and satisfying twist ending, which puts the whole musical gimmick back into perspective and begs the question: will there be more of Stumpy Sam in the future? I don’t know about you, but I’m absolutely fine with that idea.